The HONOURABLE MOLLY

Katharine Tynan



FILE COPY

2/- net

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY

A SELECTION OF

MURRAY'S 2/- Net Novels

HORACE A. VACHELL

Brothers | The Hill
Quinneys' | Loot
Fishpingle | Bunch Grass
The Fourth Dimension

GENE STRATTON-PORTER

A Daughter of the Land
Freckles | Laddie
Michael O'Halloran

H. SETON MERRIMAN

The Grey Lady | Flotsam
The Sowers | Roden's Corner
The Last Hope | In Kedar's Tents
The Vultures | The Velvet Glove
Barlasch of the Guard
The Isle of Unrest
Tomaso's Fortune
With Edged Tools
The Slave of the Lamp
From One Generation to Another

A. CONAN DOYLE

Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes
Exploits of Brigadier Gerard
Sign of Four | His Last Bow
Rodney Stone | Sir Nigel
Micah Clarke | White Company
Adventures of Gerard
Hound of the Baskervilles
The Stark Munro Letters
The Firm of Girdlestone
Round the Red Lamp

The Conan Doyle Stories.

Tales of the Ring and Camp
Tales of Pirates and Blue Water
Tales of Terror and Mystery
Tales of Twilight and the Unseen
Tales of Adventure and Medical
Tales of Long Ago Life

L. ALLEN HARKER

Montagu Wycherly
Miss Esperance and Mr. Wycherly
Mr. Wycherly's Wards
The Ffolliots of Redmarley
Jan and Her Job | Master and Maid
Concerning Paul and Fiammetta

KATHLEEN NORRIS

Martie the Unconquered
Mother Heart of Rachael
The Story of Julia Page

FILE COPY

THE HONOURABLE MOLLY

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

FISHPINGLE	Horace A. Vachell
THE BROKEN ROAD	A. E. W. Mason
THE LOST NAVAL PAPERS	Bennet Copplestone
THE WAGES OF VIRTUE	Capt. P. C. Wren
THE FFOLLIOTS OF REDMARLEY	L. Allen Harker
THE STORY OF JULIA PAGE	Kathleen Norris
THE HEART OF RACHAEL	Kathleen Norris
THE NEBULY COAT	J. Meade Falkner
FRECKLES	Gene Stratton-Porter
LADDIE	Gene Stratton-Porter
MICHAEL O'HALLORAN	Gene Stratton-Porter
QUINNEYS'	Horace A. Vachell
LOOT	Horace A. Vachell
JESS	Sir H. Rider Haggard
WITH EDGED TOOLS	Henry Seton Merriman
THE SOWERS	Henry Seton Merriman
VICE VERSA	F. Anstey
NOTWITHSTANDING	Mary Cholmondeley
MISS ESPERANCE AND MR. WYCHERLY	L. Allen Harker
MR. WYCHERLY'S WARDS	L. Allen Harker
ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES	A. Conan Doyle
MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES	A. Conan Doyle
EXPLOITS OF BRIGADIER GERARD	A. Conan Doyle
THE RED HAND OF ULSTER	George A. Birmingham
A LIFE'S MORNING	George Gissing
COURT ROYAL	S. Baring-Gould
THE HONOURABLE MOLLY	Katherine Tynan

LONDON: JOHN MURRAY.

THE HONOURABLE MOLLY

KATHARINE TYNAN

JOHN MURRAY

1919

FIRST EDITION *November*, 1903
SECOND EDITION . . . *December*, 1903
CHEAPER EDITION . . . *May*, 1914
Reprinted *June*, 1919

All rights reserved

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Bride comes Home	1
II.	King Cophetua	8
III.	A Conclave	18
IV.	Flowers	27
V.	"Who is Mr. Hugh Sinclair?"	36
VI.	The Gardener Molly	45
VII.	New Acquaintances	53
VIII.	The Steam Tram	62
IX.	Her Mother's People	70
X.	Out of the Past	77
XI.	Going Home	85
XII.	The Glen Farm	93
XIII.	Her Mother's Daughter	101
XIV.	Gossips	111
XV.	The Disclosure	120
XVI.	The Head of the Family	128
XVII.	Misfits	136
XVIII.	An International Alliance	144

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	Lovers' Meeting	153
XX.	Lovers' Talk	161
XXI.	A Sudden Recall	170
XXII.	God-speed	178
XXIII.	The Earl of Cork's Chapelry	185
XXIV.	The Warning	194
XXV.	The Wind and the Rain	201
XXVI.	A Full-dress Rehearsal	210
XXVII.	The Return	219
XXVIII.	Flight	226
XXIX.	Molly goes Home	233

THE HONOURABLE MOLLY

CHAPTER I

THE BRIDE COMES HOME

Simon Alured Fitz-John Fitz-Walter De Burgo De La Poer, Baron Creggs of Creggs Castle, was a very proud gentleman, as became his ancient high descent.

He was as poor as he was proud. His father and mother had died in his childhood, and he had been brought up by his aunts Thisbe and Penelope, who had fostered the De La Poer pride in him, if indeed it needed fostering.

The ladies had kept a brave face to the world during the heir's upbringing. No one ever knew them to soil their fingers by menial work, even though the wolf was at the door, in a manner of speaking. Thisbe was to be found in stately if somewhat ancient attire, sitting bolt upright in her chair, Penelope at her water-colour painting or at the harp, when visitors called of an afternoon. The two ladies lifted their hands in wonder and horror at Mrs. Lambert of Lambert Park, who was English and did the strangest things for mere liking of them. For Thisbe, although she was masculine in her love of power and her way of getting it, was a stickler for the feminine graces.

The Misses De La Poer had never forgotten one afternoon when they had driven over to see Mrs. Lambert, and the lady had come to them in her great glowing comfortable drawing-room, drawing off gloves heavy with clay from her gardening, and had revealed, when

she took off her jacket, a bodice of red flannel with white linen buttons which she wore unabashed through the tea-hour.

The thing affected the Misses De La Poer almost with physical nausea. It certainly prevented their enjoying the piles of hot buttered tea-cakes, and the fragrant tea with delicious cream in it, as they might have done otherwise, seeing that they had had only a snipe between them for lunch, and had driven four miles over bog and mountain.

"So indelicate!" said Thisbe to Penelope afterwards. "A garment that the woman should have kept for her bedroom!"

"I can't imagine wearing such a thing myself, even where no eyes but my own should ever rest upon it," replied Penelope. "And yet Mrs. Lambert is a well-bred woman."

"But English," added her sister, as though that covered a multitude of sins. "They sacrifice everything to comfort."

"I can't imagine what comfort there can be," said Penelope, rubbing her rheumatic fingers together, "in the wearing of woollens, especially next the skin. Horrid, raspy stuff it must be. Mrs. Lambert might have spared herself the trouble of distributing all those woollen garments at Christmas. The people never wore them. They put them under the babies or over the hatching hen. Katty Slattery laid by her blanket to be buried in. She won't make English of *us*."

Meanwhile Mrs. Lambert was pitying the two ladies to her rosy-faced, twinkling husband.

"They looked so cold, John dear," she said. "I should really have liked to tuck them away between blankets with hot-water bottles to their feet before a roaring fire. Their poor noses were quite blue, and their appetites wretched."

RBC

Mrs. Lambert, who had had a substantial lunch at two o'clock, had begun a second tea, when she and her husband were once more alone. Her assiduities towards her visitors had spoilt the first.

"Bless you, my dear, they don't want your pity. Why, they pity you! Doubtless are doing it at this moment."

"Pity me!" repeated Mrs. Lambert, opening her blue eyes to the fullest extent. "Pity me! Now what on earth could any one pity me for?"

"There spoke the true John Bull," twinkled her spouse. "Why, my dear, they pity you for your very prosperity. The comforts with which you surround yourself, your good living, the comfortable, plentiful air which you can no more get rid of than you can of your blue eyes, they pity you for these. They are so much more spiritual, so much more above the mere animal needs of the body——"

"Oh, go on," interrupted Mrs. Lambert, good-humouredly; "it is the attitude you all have towards us—even yourself, John."

"You wouldn't grudge it to us, seeing that you have the substantial things?"

"It doesn't fret me. I don't mind being considered a mere gross mass of dulness and animal instincts by Thisbe; and of course Pen takes Thisbe's lead. No humour, no sensitiveness, no imagination, no spirituality. I wonder how we got on in the world at all, much less made the stir in it we did."

"By the lack of those qualities, my dear. Oh, I know you're patient with us. It is the attitude of the dominant race. We're children to ye, fascinating if naughty."

"I agree about the fascination," Mrs. Lambert said, with an affectionate glance at her handsome spouse. She was spreading her square-toed comfortable boots to

the warmth of the fire, quite unconscious that they had been an element of offence to her visitors half an hour ago. "We lose our hearts to you even when you're most impudent to us."

"True enough; we've nothing to trust in but our fascinations. The Celts are the feminine race, so we typify Ireland as a woman. Ye'll do anything for us but give us our rights."

Thisbe would never have acknowledged or allowed the weaker Pen to acknowledge that poverty in these latter days sat at their hearthstone. There was a glorious Promised Land ahead of them in which Creggs Castle and the ancient race should rebuild their former splendour. The thought of the good things to come sweetened the privations and the occasional ignominies of their present state. Fortunately, the ignominies were few. As Mr. Lambert was fond of remarking, the Irish shopkeeper is a gentleman, and does not press for his accounts. Their own people would do anything for them except pay the rent. In the soft eyes of their servants there was no consciousness that the old ladies were threadbare as well as the castle, and that their assumptions were a little out of keeping. Sure the old blood was the old blood still, even if it ran thinly from want of the vital heat afforded by material luxuries.

Another saying of Mr. Lambert's was that Ireland was the easiest country in the world to be poor in; the mild climate, the soporific air, make one neither cold nor hungry. We are all poor together, and wealth in a manner the badge of the parvenu or the outsider. The atmosphere is full of those delicious rainbows made of the sun and the rain. They get into our eyes and our mind; and who shall say that they are not as real in the end as the guineas?

The heir was allowed to feel none of the stress of poverty. It was easy to deceive him, for he was an

unpractical youth with the eyes of Don Quixote in his raw Scottish face, under his sandy locks. He had not been to school. The De La Poers never did go to school, or else perhaps the race had lost its distinguishing characteristics. Mr. Irwin, the Rector, taught him what scholarship he was capable of receiving. Creggs was not an intellectual boy. He had a simple, austere, innocent nature, which the old clergyman used to speak of as a gift of God. Even his pride was lovable, for while it set him above the meannesses of pettier natures he saw the whole world by the light of what it meant to himself, and was slow to imagine vices or foibles in others.

He had a tall, well-set-up, manly figure, and, although plain-looking, had an aristocratic air. The pale whitey-grey homespuns made into Norfolk jacket and knicker-bockers for him by Johnny Nolan, the tailor of Ballina-mona, sat on him like the creations of Poole.

His mother's beauty had had no part in him. The male De La Poers were indeed, as a rule, rather plain-looking, which was odd enough since it was a tradition of the family to marry beauty.

But his aunts had no fault to find with him. He was the light of their eyes. By-and-by he was to go out into the world and meet and marry Beauty with a great fortune.

The aunts were quite certain it would be so. The greatest heiress might be proud, Thisbe thought, to gild the tarnished escutcheon of the De La Poers ; and, since Thisbe thought so, of course Pen thought so too. And Creggs in himself was fit to win any woman's heart.

They were quite unconscious that they were not training him at all for the part he was to play. The tall lad, roaming the woods and mountains with a gun on his shoulder, fishing alone the livelong day, his thoughts full of impossible ideals and loyalties, was cast for no worldly part in the drama of life. Poor ladies,

they were as little fit to impart as he was to learn. They might have known that he would marry for love, as his father had done before him. Yet, sitting in the great drawing-rooms, with the turf fires burning to white ashes at either end, the ladies talked of the time when Creggs should bring home the princess with the money-bags to Creggs Castle, as though fate were ready to fall in with their schemes.

He was twenty when he had his first look into the world. He was sent up to Dublin in charge of Mr. Irwin for Horse Show week. This outing had been long foreseen and arranged for. They made a month of it in the capital, so that Creggs should be properly tailored before entering those doors at which the aunts now knocked for him with a memory of the days when they had been welcome guests in the most exclusive circles of Dublin society.

Mr. Irwin returned without his charge, his own holiday-time being up, and the *locum tenens* off to fresh engagements.

Miss Thisbe was well pleased, Miss Pen was enraptured. Lord Creggs was the guest of a certain dear Archdeacon whose ancestry even they respected. He had daughters too old to threaten the boy's peace of mind, the stern arbiters of elegance and good taste in their circle, and that was the best Dublin could afford.

Mr. Irwin reported Creggs a great social success, much in request at the Viceregal Lodge, and pleasing those whose good opinion was worth having. Miss Thisbe was gratified, if the least bit in the world inclined to think the Rector's assurances out of place. A De La Poer was sure to be a social success when the occasion arose.

The ladies lived on the letters from Dublin during the weeks that followed. Certainly the house was very dull without Creggs. Every one felt it so, from the ladies to the dogs.

Then a week or two came during which the correspondence shrank to hasty notes, even to post-cards, things which Miss Thisbe did not like, although, since Creggs had sanctioned them by using them, her point of view must necessarily change. On the top of the post-cards a telegram : Creggs was coming home.

What preparations there were ! He had given four days' notice, and a great cleaning was set afoot. As though there was anything to clean in the sparsely furnished ascetic rooms, swept by breezes from the Atlantic, beeswaxed and polished year in and year out by an army of somewhat ragged handmaidens under the old housekeeper, Sibbie Roche, who knew how to get the work out of them if they were ragged.

" Sure his lordship'll never see that we've been clanin' at all, at all," said one soft-eyed girl to another. " It might as well be for the bride we wor doin' it."

As though to carry out her words, Miss Thisbe had ordered the state apartments to be made ready for Lord Creggs. The little room, full of boyish trophies, bare and masculine-looking, which had served for his boyhood, would not do for him after the luxuries of Dublin. It was a sort of assumption of the *toga virilis* in his aunt's mind when they opened the late Lord Creggs' rooms, long shut up except for the purposes of cleaning, and made them ready for his son.

Naturally, too, her ladyship's rooms shared in the general furbishing, since they were side by side with his lordship's.

" When the bride comes home," said Miss Penelope to Miss Thisbe, " she will no doubt add many little luxuries : it is an age of luxury among the young. But the rooms are very pleasant to my mind."

" And to mine," assented Thisbe, refraining for once from snubbing her sister, and looking round the great bedroom with the hangings of blue silk shading the dark

mahogany bed, and the few pieces of delicate Sheraton furniture standing out against the panelled walls. "She will have an unrivalled prospect."

The windows of twelve panes that almost reached the floor looked across the waters of the Lough to the mountains on the other side. It was a pale gold September evening, and the room was flooded with the cold radiance. The sky was yellow; the mountains pansy-purple. The imperial golds and purples with which the year clothes herself at her fall were on the wave and the land.

"Sure maybe there'll be a haulin'-home soon," replied Lizzie Brennan to Mary Dea, the damsel who had supposed that his lordship would have no eyes for the result of their labours.

It was quite late when Creggs arrived. The groaning old barouche had gone to meet him. As it drove up, the aunts stood side by side at the end of the great drawing-room as though they received a royal guest.

There was a little commotion in the hall. Then the door was flung open, and Barney Daly, the butler, announced in a voice that trembled with excitement—

"Lord and Lady Creggs!"

The sisters uttered a faint cry, then Miss Thisbe steadied herself and stood bolt upright with a restraining hand on Penelope's arm. Creggs was walking up the room with an air as though he had conquered the world, a slight golden-haired girl clinging to his arm.

The bride had come home.

CHAPTER II

KING COPHETUA

The new Lady Creggs was the daughter of a parson in the Midlands who had a quiverful of girls, and turned

them out, when they had reached the age of discretion, to earn their own bread and find a few crumbs for those who were left in the nest as well.

She had been governess in a house at which Lord Creggs visited, and had seemed overpowered by the healthy young barbarians whose task-mistress she was supposed to be.

"Miss Gray has no idea of managing the children," said their adoring mother to Lord Creggs, whose simplicity seemed to make him the proper recipient for such confidences; "yet I am sure they are affectionate children. There never was a bit of trouble with them while our dear Miss Marston remained. They don't seem to like Miss Gray."

She was a kind-hearted woman, and she poured forth to the young man, who was so ready to listen, her grief that she would have to send the girl back to the overfull parental nest. Lord Creggs nodded his head during the recital, the head which he had a gracious trick of inclining towards those who spoke to him as though for the moment the world held only them and their concerns.

"She has not been a success, this poor Mildred," went on the kind-hearted woman. "I don't think she has the vocation for a governess. Yet my children, God bless them, are generous. I don't think it is their fault."

"Are not every mother's children generous?" asked Lord Creggs.

Mrs. Armstrong for a moment suspected banter, but absolved him after a glance at his high-minded, guileless, country face.

"Oh! not at all," she answered. "There are all sorts of children as there are all sorts of grown-up people. Original sin is not replaced at the Sacrament of Baptism by original perfection. Yet my children *are* generous

and affectionate. Miss Gray takes no hold on their affections. I am rather inclined to think she is cold, a little shallow, perhaps : and the children have found it out."

Lord Creggs gazed at the subject of discussion when next he saw her with eyes more than ever like the eyes of Don Quixote. She had the colouring of an angel, white and gold. Her face was round as a young angel's. Her lips were a little pale and sad, yet as she lifted her eyes to some one who had offered her some small attention, and smiled, the ghost of a dimple came in either cheek.

A day or two later he met her crossing St. Stephen's Green. Mrs. Armstrong made occasions for her to be out by herself while old Nurse took the children, who were always amenable to her.

He took her hand and bent above it. She faltered out something about having gone on an errand for Mrs. Armstrong. A wave of stormy indignation rolled over his heart. She did things that had better be left to the footman or the page-boy.

In some delicate, indefinite way he conveyed to her that he thought of her as a martyr. She accepted the point of view with amazing quickness, although hitherto she had only felt that the children were tiresome. She had had too much of children at home : and her ideal of life would have been never to need to do anything for herself or any one else as long as she lived ; to have a carriage to drive in, and maids and footmen to obey her lightest behest.

They sat down an instant by the pond. The children who fed the ducks in the morning had gone home with their nurses. The afternoons were growing short, and the blue haze of autumn gathered under the trees, filled the encircling streets, where the sudden lights springing up were cool as silver in the azure.

Before that meeting Mildred had known in an

indifferent way that Mrs. Armstrong was kind and patient, the children amiable in their overpowering manner, if given to making strange demands upon her which she did not understand and could not answer.

But this other point of view wiped that out. The young man's passionate and chivalrous solicitude for her swept her off her feet. Her face, as it glimmered pale in the shadow of the little bower in which they sat, made Lord Creggs' innocent and tender heart hot within him.

She left Mrs. Armstrong almost immediately after that meeting, and made a triumphal descent upon the Vicarage. For that one moment of her life she was energetic. It was delightful to be received with glum faces because she was once again back on their hands, and to see the mourning turned to joy when she announced the reason of her coming.

"You will be able to do so much for your brothers and sisters," said her mother.

Mildred looked sullen, and the angelic character of her face was altered.

"I shall never do anything for myself again," she said, under her breath.

A little later she was Lady Creggs, the innocent destroyer of the Hon. Thisbe's and the Hon. Penelope's airy dreams.

She had unbounded capacities for extravagance, and if Creggs had had any revenues she would have been capable of spending them to the last farthing.

Imagine, then, poor lady! her state of mind when she discovered herself the possessor of an empty title, and an out-at-elbows old castle, with a husband so well satisfied with himself and his family that he was never likely to make an effort after better things. Condemned to solitude, no parties, no visits to town, no fine frocks, no wandering about the world. Only always, always

Lord Creggs, silent when he was not expressing sentiments which to her mind were absolute lunacy; Thisbe, who wanted to rule her, the mistress of Creggs Castle and all it contained; and Penelope, too ready with foolish caresses and tendernesses over Simon's heavenly-looking wife.

The disappointment broke whatever heart she possessed. She had nothing, nothing at all for her bargain: for what good was a title when one never went abroad to air it? And there was her sister Lucy, who had not half her looks, and had gone to nursing and married a Jewish financier whom she had carried through a bad attack of gout, and now had a house in Park Lane!

She brought two girl babies into the world, and died after the second was born, making no lament at leaving a world that had proved so disappointing.

Her young husband grieved for her sincerely. It had never occurred to him to regret his quixotic marriage; and if the angelic bride had comported herself coldly and sullenly during the few years of their married life, that was something to be forgotten when she lay with her golden hair drawn round her ivory face, sanctified for ever in that she had died in a last act of love for him, in the eternal pathos of a death in child-birth.

Except in his memory she was forgotten after a time. The aunts, when their first sharp disappointment was over, had been ready to give her their hearts as Lady Creggs; but she had not wanted them, and when she was gone, it was only as though some pale indifferent shadow of a woman had departed. She had lit no hearth-fire, tended none, and her absence made little difference. With the servants and the people about she had been distant and cold, not understanding the way of the De La Poers with their dependants. The little circle in which she lived had observed her indifference to her first baby, and been scandalised by it.

She had never been of the life about her, and after she passed out of it, there was an unacknowledged relief as if an ever-present stranger at the fireside had suddenly betaken herself elsewhere.

It was quite a long time before Thisbe allowed herself to say to Penelope, whose discretion she doubted, that Simon's choice had been a failure. Thisbe had a masculine freedom from small and enduring resentments; and had quickly forgotten the bride who had been merciless to the spinsters' pride, and had shown something of a desire to box the ears of those who so contentedly inhabited a fool's paradise.

"Not even an heir, sister," she said, sighing so windily that it seemed to stir the faded tapestry on the wall.

"Two girls and never a boy," replied Penelope, who was always glad to agree with her sister; "and unless Creggs marries again and has a son the title goes to the De Vere De La Poers, whom our poor father disliked so much and would never be friends with."

"That must not be!" said Thisbe, determinedly. "Creggs must marry and have an heir."

"He must marry and have an heir," repeated Penelope, dutifully.

But with Lord Creggs, in the years that followed, it seemed as though his first excursion into the world and into love would be his last. He had made a few friends during that Dublin visit who were not willing to let the friendship drop. So that it was not for want of opportunity that he kept his face steadily away from the world.

One or two people touring in those wild districts of the North-West found him out, were entertained with all the hospitality Creggs Castle could afford, and that was by no means contemptible now that Lord Creggs wandered for ever, gun on shoulder or fishing-rod in

hand. But in time these few links dropped off from want of reciprocation, and he was as lonely as ever.

Other people had match-making thoughts for him as well as his aunts. There was Mrs. Lambert, his nearest neighbour, only four Irish miles away, who imported gaiety and blooming nieces and cousins into these wilds, all in vain.

Creggs liked Mrs. Lambert, but was the most elusive of mortals where the young ladies were concerned. If he had to meet them his behaviour was perfect, his manner simple, cordial, and frank. Yet the beautiful damsels made no impression on him, and after a time Mrs. Lambert found out that he avoided meeting them.

"He is determined not to be caught again," she said to her husband, "and it is so tiresome of him, John. After all, what has he to offer a girl except his title and the mouldy glories of Creggs Castle? And there was dear Violet really interested in him, and her portion won't be a penny less than a hundred thousand, and he has let her slip through his fingers! Upon my word, I wash my hands of him!"

"He'll be obliged to you if you'll keep to that resolution, Mary. I wish you would, my dear. There's no one I like better to chat to and smoke with than Creggs. And you frighten him off, you really do, with those girls you bring after him. Let the poor fellow alone. It is a month or more since he has been over—not since he met Vi, I think."

"What does he suppose is going to happen to those little girls of his? How are they to be educated and clothed and married? He's downright selfish—that's what he is!"

"Perhaps he was too fond of his first wife."

Mrs. Lambert shrugged her shoulders at the mention of the late Lady Creggs.

"I wonder if he kept a shred of illusion about her,"

she said musingly. "No other man would, but Creggs might."

"I hope the little girls will take after him," said Mr. Lambert. "They grow more like him every day."

"Fortunately not in looks. They have her beauty with his dignity. They ought to do well if they get a chance. I hope they won't be as impracticable as he is."

"Are you going to transfer your match-making to them? They are only—let me see——"

"Oonagh is eight, Nora under seven. If I don't match-make for them no one else will."

Mrs. Lambert was enjoying herself at her husband's expense. He had conceded her, long before this, a sense of humour, adding that she had acquired it by her residence in Ireland, as she had acquired certain modifications of her accent.

She had been the one to discover behind the simplicity of Lord Creggs' nature a curious baffling reserve and reticence which had made her say that his innocence was only equalled by his cunning. She often pointed triumphantly to this piece of discernment in the time that followed, when the news of his second marriage came like a bomb-shell on his little world. No one had noticed anything unusual about him. He was abroad all day, but then he was generally abroad all day. There was nothing in his manner to suggest any upheaval of the emotions or the events of his ordinary life, no softening of the frostiness which had come upon his face with the years of manhood, a frostiness which was but the mask to a tender and unworldly nature.

To make a long story short, the second Lady Creggs was a farmer's daughter, Molly O'Neill by name, from the mountain side over the Lough where his lordship had been accustomed to go fishing.

One day, when it was too sunny for the fish to rise, he had sauntered up the mountain side and asked Molly

for a drink of butter-milk. She was churning outside the farmhouse door, in the shade of a thorn tree, wearing a pink cotton frock open at the neck, and with her sleeves rolled above her elbows.

His lordship stared at her as though he saw heaven opened. Molly was a pretty girl with milky-white skin, black hair, and long black lashes over the bluest eyes. Her bare throat was as white as the butter-milk. She put up her hand and drew her collar closer, blushing as he looked at her. Her arms were beautiful. Her figure had the soft flowing lines which belong to a certain type of Irish beauty—a beauty no words can render because it is wrapped in an alluring softness, a gracious tenderness that lies upon the woman like the veil of Madonna.

Lord Creggs' wooing was not long a-doing. Molly seemed too dazed with her glorious fortune to have any clear thoughts in those days. Her father, Daniel O'Neill, hard-headed, yet in a sense as much a visionary as Lord Creggs himself, put the girl into the noble suitor's arms.

"Sure if we had our rights," he said to the girl's mother, "'tis in a castle finer than Creggs Castle we'd be living."

He said as much to Lord Creggs, and was heard with a grave acceptance of his claims. It was true that the O'Neills had come down in the world long ago, as the De La Poers were on their way to come down. Lord Creggs' pride was of the kind that would own kinship with good blood in a hovel, and would haughtily disown base blood, although it had risen to the highest places.

It was no hole-and-corner marriage. He married Molly in the church of her own religion, a bare wind-swept place with a clay floor, where you might see on a Sunday morning the worshippers with adoring faces

pressing close to the altar-rails, for the time oblivious of cold and wet, rainy seasons and the blight, and all the other ills that flesh is heir to in those latitudes.

He married her and brought her home: and once again Thisbe, and Penelope following, accepted the situation loyally, though Thisbe whispered to Penelope in a moment of weakness that the second marriage had broken her heart.

But Creggs was the child of Thisbe's upbringing. To Creggs it never seemed that his marriage needed apology. If his bride committed any solecisms in the early days of their married life, he did not seem to discover them, and they soon disappeared, for Molly had the amazing adaptiveness of the Irish girl, and moreover had been a pupil at the convent, and had learnt in that school of almost finicking refinement which every convent is.

After all there were not many to stare at Molly and whisper of the farmer's daughter who became a lord's bride. The servants, who perhaps resented the marriage more bitterly than the ladies, accepted the thing in time. Molly had a curious dignity that impressed itself in time upon even the most froward.

Her husband adored her, and in time her step-daughters came to call her mamma, the finest possible tribute from these proud little ladies. Thisbe accepted her; and Penelope, who had capitulated in her heart long before, was only too ready to take Thisbe's lead, and love the little blue-eyed Molly who was the one child of the second marriage: for this Lady Creggs, like the other, failed to do her duty and oust the De Vere De La Poers from the succession to the title.

Molly De La Poer might well have forgotten the days when she was Molly O'Neil. Her mother died in the year after her marriage; and her father, with an austere self-denial, cut himself off from communication with his only daughter.

That was something Lord Creggs would not have asked for nor desired; but it raised Daniel O'Neill in the estimation of Thisbe amazingly. No one but herself knew that it was after a visit she had paid to Molly's home that the strange abnegation came about. Miss Thisbe had a way of imposing her will on even strong natures.

Perhaps only to her own little Molly, and then unwittingly, did the poor lady betray her one cause of unhappiness. Years after, when Lady Creggs slept in the family vault, Molly could recall her mother's face as she stood in her own room of the beautiful view and looked away over the Lough to the dark mountain peak soaring into the clouds. Over there was the home of her childhood. Over there were her father, and many of her relations, proud, thrifty, industrious people, who would never claim her against her will. The child's heart had been troubled for the hunger in the woman's eyes with a curious understanding of it. With only the child for witness Lady Creggs' loneliness for her own people was laid bare. When, after those moments of saddest reverie, she snatched up her little Molly and kissed her passionately, she may have kissed into her some of the heart-hunger which laid waste her own happiness.

CHAPTER III

A CONCLAVE

Lord Creggs survived his second wife by a good many years, and died at last, as he would have chosen to die, in an heroic effort to save the victims of a bog-slide. Some of them were his people; but if they had not been he would have gone to his death for them all the same.

He was sucked into the dreadful roaring mass of

peat travelling away down the valley between the mountains to the sea, and carrying with it little homes, and old men and women, and little children, and cattle and sheep, and the provender for the hard winter.

No one thought of saying that a humbler man ought to have died in his place. The torrent flung him up again after it had had its will with him, as it happened, on the greensward fronting the church where he and Molly O'Neill had been made one. His face was stained with the peat, battered and bruised, his limbs twisted and broken, but his expression was not one of horror and fear. He was carried into the church, and lay before the altar a whole day ere the vault closed over him. Many a one came to look at him, and thought he looked prouder in this disfiguring death than in his life. His lips smiled serenely. The lids were down over the eyes that had been the eyes of Don Quixote.

He left little or nothing for his three girls. Money had counted for little in his own life. His aunts had their scanty jointures. Creggs Castle remained unclaimed by the new lord. Labour was cheap; and there were the birds of the air and the mountain, the wild creatures of the wood, the fish in the rivers, and the few mountain sheep and wild little mountain cattle yet left to the owners of thousands of unprofitable acres.

About a year after that great grief, the five ladies who now represented the family at Creggs sat in consultation one day over an important matter. Or at least Molly and Thisbe consulted: the others listened.

The elder ladies hardly looked appreciably older than they had done that day nearly thirty years ago when they had called on Mrs. Lambert. They had been elderly at thirty-seven and forty: at sixty-seven and seventy or thereabouts they were hardly more than elderly. Thisbe was handsome, with eyes that could

still flash, straight strong features, and a complexion that had been rich and warm, though now the flush in the cheeks suggested a little too much the unnatural flush of suffering. Thisbe, the indomitable, had developed in her will's despite a troublesome heart, and never could be persuaded to follow the specialist's prescription not to get excited and to give the organ plenty of rest. Penelope, on the contrary, had still a certain helpless prettiness which was enhanced by the daintiness of her dress. Though she was in mourning for Lord Creggs, the sombre black was softened by scraps of old Maltese lace at the neck and wrists. A scrap rested on her fine hair with an airy grace. She wore many old-fashioned rings, and she was never seen without mittens.

Oonagh and Nora were as like each other as though they had been twins. The only difference between them was that Oonagh's hair was straight and soft, while Nora's curled: so while Oonagh piled her locks in soft gold masses that decked her angelic pale head better than a coronet, Nora looked from between a mass of golden curls. The hair was so fine and so liquid in its lines that it was like spun glass, and in its fineness and softness it was an index to the character of the sisters.

There were certain pale water-colour drawings of ladies of the house who might have belonged to the same order of women. It was the beauty of the Books of Beauty of the Thirties and Forties, and doubtless Creggs Castle was its proper setting. It was not made for a rough world. Country girls as the young ladies must be considered, they would as soon have thought of going abroad without their veils and parasols as without their gowns, so the sun had no chance to mar their delicate fairness; and the mild soft air of that part of the world is a beauty-bath in itself.

They sat now each with a screen of peacock feathers between their faces and the flame on the hearth. The storms of the winter had brought down many trees, and the turf was supplemented by logs.

Molly sighed to herself half humorously as she sat prepared to have her battle out with Thisbe. Her vivid colouring singled her out as very unlike her sisters. She had the softness of her mother, the farmer's daughter, her clear pale cheeks and blue eyes under lashes of night. When Molly slept, her eyes seemed always half-open, so dense and dark those lashes were. But the fine springing arches of her brows were not Molly O'Neill's. They went back to some beautiful Creggs lady, or to some O'Neill before the blood was mixed with peasant blood. She had the little upward sweep of the corner of the eyelid which is so fresh and bewilderingly sweet in Sir Joshua Reynolds's ladies. Her lips were softly red and made a delightful waving line ; her mouth was too large to please her aunt Penelope, whose canons of beauty were exacting. But against her teeth there was nothing to say, nor against her firm white chin, "round as a china cup," as Allingham's ballad has it. By her figure, though Molly was only twenty, her sisters looked meagre. She was all softness, all delicate sweeping lines, and not an angle to be seen.

Her hands were likewise the despair of Penelope. They were shapely but they were brown. Their owner was fond of their brownness, enjoying the colouring of them as a smoker enjoys the browning of his pipe.

Penelope often said that it was lucky the atmosphere seemed kindly disposed towards Molly's complexion, for she never wore a veil nor put up a parasol. While her sisters' fairness was the somewhat artificial fairness of indoor life, hers was warm with health and the breath of the mountains and the sea.

The immediate subject of the discussion was an unexpected windfall which had come to Molly, and for which Molly had a very distinct destination. Otherwise there would possibly have been no conclave, and things would have gone on just as they were. Terence Daly, the old butler's son, who was a ne'er-do-weel, more at home on the bogs or the mountains than under a roof, might be trusted to keep the larder pretty well stocked with fish and game. He had been wont to accompany Lord Creggs on his fishing expeditions during his life-time, and knew better than any other man in the country where the trout lay thickest, the pools the wild duck most affected, the haunts of snipe and tern and all shy birds.

Nor, if it depended on him, would the ladies lack a partridge or a pheasant, even though it meant following them into Lord Carbery's or Sir John Mansfield's woods. The shooting of Creggs was of a very rough description. The game had never been preserved, and everybody poached it. "Sure the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea couldn't be one man's property," said the peasants; and, if it was, what odds when they could send an odd brace to the castle or to Sir John or his lordship that never came off the lands of the recipients? Poaching indeed was general, and the bench of magistrates not above reproach. Didn't Lord Carbery and that divil, Mick Byrne, scale the monks' wall, and poach the salmon their Riverences had laid down in the river? And if his lordship hadn't poached the Arabeg for them afterwards, wouldn't the holy men have gone fasting all Lent? Morebetoken, didn't Sir John, when he was going to have the Countess to dinner, mention, like as if it was nothing at all to anybody, that he was sorry the pheasants were done, and didn't Dunphy, standing behind his chair, give a wink at Tom Lacey the footman? and didn't the finest brace turn

up the next night at dinner? And didn't Sir John say afterwards—

"Dunphy, you villain, where did those pheasants come from? You're a low poaching scoundrel, Dunphy, or your brother Larry is, and the next time he's up before me it will be six months. I'll have to make him my gamekeeper, so I will, to keep him straight. He was asking me for Leary's cottage for that old mother of yours. He can have it, the scoundrel."

The ladies at Creggs were not likely to go hungry; nor to lack garments of a quaint beautiful shape, for the wardrobes of the family bedrooms were stacked with silks and brocades which Julia O'Loughlin, who had been a lady's maid, could always modernise according to the fashions of Dublin ten years ago; nor shelter, nor firewood: so, after all, the needs of the body were provided for.

But Molly was restless, and since the windfall was Molly's it was hers to say what should be done with it.

The very day of the bog-slide, Daniel O'Neill died in his lonely farmhouse, leaving to his grand-daughter, the Honourable Molly De La Poer, eight hundred pounds.

It seemed a good deal of money to the ladies at the castle, who hardly ever handled any but the tiniest sums. They had declared unanimously that the sum must be set aside for Molly's own use, but at the suggestion Molly had smiled with a rich contempt.

"A hundred pounds will pay off Carmody and the shop. Of course they never would send us a bill, but it can't be more than fifty pounds apiece. Dear papa paid Carmody something on account a few years ago, and we hardly ever eat butcher's meat. And of course our grocery account is small, since I am the only one that eats sugar, and the one big pot of tea does the servants all day."

"Carmody was quite offended when your dear father paid him that money on account," said Miss Thisbe; "and Mrs. Brady asked what the shop had done to his lordship."

"I'll have to roll up the money and put it into little Barney Brady's fist, and pretend to Carmody that having the money is an inconvenience to me," said Molly, laughing. "A hundred of it ought to go to the servants. Yes, I know. Daly said the other day that the only reason he'd look at wages was that he might have savings to leave us in his will. Still he hasn't had any for a long time."

"The servants at Creggs Castle have never thought of wages," said Thisbe, loftily. "What would they require them for, seeing they would always fare the same as the family? I remember that my dear mother nursed with her own sweet hands two of the maids who caught the typhus after the great famine. Pen and I have always taken care of the servants when they were ill. We should no more send them to the hospital than we should send one of your children. What do they want with money?"

"A little pocket money," began Oonagh, meekly.

"I told Daly the other day," went on Thisbe, unheeding, "that, in consideration of his long and faithful service, I hoped to close his eyes with my own hands before I was called hence. He was greatly pleased. He said he hoped he might live a thousand years, and that he didn't want a better place than the castle."

Molly suppressed a smile. She was the only one of the family who had much sense of humour.

"Daly may live a long time yet," she said demurely. "He can't be much over fifty, although he has been forty years at Creggs. But there still remains a lot of money. Well, I propose to start a business with it, to

use up my superfluous energy. You know, Aunt Thisbe, I'm always restless."

"A business!" Thisbe repeated in consternation. The others only stared. "A business, Molly! Do you forget that you are Lord Creggs' daughter?"

"A perfectly genteel business," said Molly, deprecatingly but firmly.

"Not a bonnet-shop such as Mrs. Lambert talks about ladies having!" said Thisbe, bristling, "for I won't hear of it, Molly."

"The money would never run to it," said Molly.

"Not a servants' employment office. That would take you away from us," faltered Penelope, looking at her sister.

"I wouldn't leave Creggs for worlds."

"It must be poultry, then," suggested Oonagh with a scared air.

"Not poultry. I couldn't bear to live on slaughter."

"I'm so glad," breathed Oonagh, relieved. "What would Creggs be, strewn with blood and feathers and filled with the dying shrieks of creatures you had nursed and fed? I couldn't have endured it."

"Is it honey?" asked Nora. "It can't be eggs since that would mean fowl, too, for I suppose you couldn't always keep the same fowl?"

"It is flowers," said Molly, "not to keep you in suspense. I am going to have a violet farm."

"It sounds a business fit for any lady," said Thisbe with prompt decision.

"It recalls the poetry we used to read together, Thisbe and I," said Penelope. "Quite like Mr. Shenstone, isn't it? But you can't make money out of violets, Molly."

"Oh yes, I shall. There will be not only violets, but daffodils and narcissi, and wallflowers and the other flowers in their season."

"The rain will spoil them," said Oonagh.

"Not the flowers I shall cultivate. I cannot hope to have roses, alas! but the flowers that do not depend on too much sun will grow here as well as in a hot-house. Carrigart over there"—she nodded her head towards a great blue cone which seemed to lean towards them—"protects us from the north; the Purple Hill from the east. We lie open to the west and the south. Our climate is half tropical."

"Who will buy the flowers?" asked Nora.

"They will go to Dublin."

"Ah, you are thinking of the light railway," said Thisbe. "I can't think what Mr. Balfour means by such monstrosities. It is very hard on the gentry to have such things frightening their horses and making the country hideous. I used to hope they might not come in my day."

"They won't frighten Jerry." Jerry was the fat twenty-year-old pony. "And I don't suppose Mr. Balfour was thinking of the gentry," answered Molly.

"But of whom, then, could he be thinking?" asked Thisbe, with such surprise that Molly's lips again took the demure line.

"Of whom, indeed?" she answered. "But Mr. Balfour's intentions are not the question. I am going to Ballinamona to-morrow to see Mr. Beecham and consult him about my plan."

"You seem to have made up your mind," said Thisbe, a little resentfully. "Running in and out of business-men's houses like that, too! Of course Beecham is not a gentleman. Why, bless me, his grandfather was gardener at Creggs Castle. I know what you are going to say, Molly, that he has the poets at his fingers' ends, and has a good collection of books; and is much respected by the gentry——"

"I wasn't going to say that," put in Molly.

"Well, then, you ought to have said it," answered Thisbe, testily. "For it is the only argument worth advancing."

It was noticeable that any airing of republican views on Molly's part was wont to perturb her great-aunt.

"It is the only argument worth advancing," she repeated. "Your dear father thought very well of Beecham or I wouldn't allow you to frequent his shop. Books and poetry! Bless you, that doesn't make a man a gentleman. Very well, Molly. I will countenance this scheme of yours if you will assure me that it will content you and keep you at home. You are always wanting to do things, so unlike your dear sisters. I wish you resembled them in that. Three hundred pounds of the money to be put by for your future use; two hundred to forward this scheme of yours; the rest as you desire."

"It will keep me at home, Aunt This," Molly assured her.

"No running over to Ballinamona every other day?"

"The work will take all my time."

"Very well, I consent then," said Thisbe, handsomely.

CHAPTER IV

FLOWERS

Mr. Harley Beecham, the florist and nurseryman of Ballinamona, had far other than a merely local reputation. His catalogues and circulars fluttered up and down England and Scotland, even to the Continent and America; and in the journals that deal with gardening his signature was well known. Though he had chosen to establish himself at the back of God-speed, as Ballinamona was, he had the most improved methods, the latest

knowledge of everything that belonged to his industry. He made frequent journeys to the flower and fruit growing districts, to Holland, the Riviera, and the Scilly Islands, and was a welcome guest at the houses of his Dutch and English and Southern brothers in the craft.

The remarkable thing about Mr. Beecham was that he made an art of his business. His catalogues were delightful things. What nurseryman before him had thought of placing in the front of his catalogue Bacon's praises of a garden, and heralding the different sections with extracts from the poets ?

He was a little old man who wore still the frilled shirt-fronts of his young manhood, and dangled a bunch of seals at his fob. He invariably wore a snuff-coloured suit, to all appearance the same year after year, and as invariably took snuff and then handed the tortoise-shell box inlaid with silver to the person he was talking with if that person happened to be a male. Since he was very neat in his habits, the colour of his garments could not have been selected as a cover for his snuff-taking.

His house was on the Mall, one of a terrace of houses raised above the street, to the front door of which you ascended by a flight of steps from the pathway. They were houses of consideration, a little gloomy-looking from the outside, but inside bright and cheerful by reason of their big windows and the spaciousness of the rooms.

The business overran the house. There was no common shop where seeds were sold and plants purchased. Somewhere at the back, out of sight, was a warehouse. Many clerks drove their quills behind counters which suggested those of a bank, and the rooms given up to the business were lined from floor to ceiling with shelves and drawers.

Mr. Beecham received Molly in his private room, which lay at the back of the house and overlooked a very beautiful old garden. Beyond its ancient yew hedge one saw ranges of glass houses. This room did not at all suggest business except in so far as it had many bulbs in glasses and pots and some fine palms and ferns. Otherwise it was a library, books going from the floor to the ceiling. Above the fireplace was a copy of that exquisite Francia in which the Virgin adores the Child laid amid the flowers of the field.

Mr. Beecham's collection of ancient herbals and such things was unique and almost priceless. He was indebted to them for some of the simples and washes and sweet-powders, the recipes for which helped to make his catalogues the delightful things they were.

He greeted Molly with an effusive cordiality tempered by the most delicate respect. His manners were charming.

"Ah," he said, "here you come, Miss Molly, fresh as a violet this early winter day. Won't you sit down? Let me order a cup of tea for you. No? Well, then, a glass of cowslip wine. You can't refuse that."

Molly couldn't, and sipped the liquid, which really tasted and smelt of cowslips—being brewed by Mr. Beecham himself from the recipe of old Gerard, the one which commended itself so much to Lady Powys—out of a pale golden Venetian glass tapering to a fine point.

When Molly admired it its owner drew her attention to the fact that it was doubtless imagined from a flower. He had taken the glass from a low cupboard beside the fire, through the panes of which Molly could see all sorts of beautiful glasses, old and new, from the lily-like shapes of Venice to the rock crystal of Waterford. In a flanking cupboard the other side of the brass hobs of the grate was china as beautiful and as rare.

Before they entered on a business conversation, Mr. Beecham pushed over for Miss De La Poer's inspection a pile of catalogues still standing in their wrappings. The cover had a design of daffodils on a green ground.

"My new Daffodil Book," Mr. Beecham said, with modest pride.

Molly took it, and read on the cover—

> "I am the Mower Damon, known
> By all the meadows I have mown.
> On me the morn her dew distills
> Before her darling daffodils,
> And coming home the evening sweet
> In cowslip water bathes my feet."

"How lovely that is!" cried Molly, in awestruck tones. "Who wrote it?"

"It is Marvell," said the old gentleman, taking a pinch of snuff; "and you may well say it is lovely. It is like golden water, the very sound of it. I hope that will make the fortune of my Daffodil Book. Inside there are the usual things, 'Fair Daffodils,' and 'I wandered lonely as a cloud,' and 'Diaphenia like the Daffadowndilly,' and all the rest."

He took up a copy of the catalogue, and turned it over with delight.

"Have you ever considered, Miss Molly," he asked, "how beautiful a thing a catalogue of flowers is? Look at the names now! Field of the Cloth of Gold, Golden Knight, March Gold, Yellow o' Saffron. I keep the old titles. Poets made them. Nowadays the gardener who has produced a fine hybrid calls it Mrs. Smith or Lady Dobson. I stick to the old names. Why, even the generic name, Daffodil or Jonquil—what could be more beautiful?"

"Nothing," assented Molly, heartily. "But, Mr. Beecham, I wanted to tell you that I have laid my project of flower and presently fruit growing before my

aunts. They are not averse from it. And now I want you to give me all the practical advice you can and will. I have about a hundred and fifty pounds to expend. That must cover everything till I begin to make a profit. I shall begin with violets. I think Aunt Thisbe liked the sound of a violet farm."

"No wonder. It is a subject for a poem," said Mr. Beecham, helping himself to another pinch of snuff in a dreamy fashion. "Ah, Miss Molly, you have a great opportunity. You have so much land up there at Creggs going to waste. I see acres of flowers, and I see orchards. I remember a southern slope there above the house. It ought to be covered with apple orchards. We should be a fruit and flower growing country, with judgment—mind, with judgment. We can't grow good strawberries: too little sun and too much rain. 'God might have made, but He did not make, a better berry than the strawberry.' That did not mean the Irish strawberry. Cold and sour, cold and sour. Nor peaches: we can't ripen peaches. Our autumn too soon loses the vital heat. But apples, my dear! Where can you taste better than the Irish peach-apple? And cherries and plums and pears and gooseberries and currants—all the hardier fruits. Then for the flowers—our soil and atmosphere are those of a hothouse, moist and warm. We can do everything but roses. Roses want the sun as strawberries do."

Molly listened in reverence. Mr. Beecham was a pastmaster in the art of which she was a humble disciple. He had almost forgotten her presence, and kept administering pinch after pinch of snuff to himself as he rambled on.

"I saw a little window at the other end of the town," said Molly, "which had never been there only for you. Ballinamona is a dreary place. The window was full of tomatoes, scarlet and yellow. There was a

plate of pears and one of plums, and a basin of blackberries. I wanted to paint that window. It made the sad street beautiful."

"I know—Peggy Sheehan keeps the shop. A decent woman. She does sell my tomatoes. The people were shy of them at first. Now they know what a wholesome fruit it is. And the blackberries! We shall make something very fine of them with cultivation. Not over-cultivation, you understand. They grow abundantly at Creggs—the briars, I mean—those that grow the large-beaded juicy variety, as superior to the other as a plum is to a sloe. You should cultivate them, Miss Molly."

"I should like to in time," said Molly, modestly.

"Ah yes, in time. Hasten slowly: that must be our motto. Do you remember that it was an Englishman, the glorious Raleigh, who brought orchards to our shores? or at least stocked them with new fruits? I forgive him much filibustering for that. Those tomatoes now. And if we could but grow his tobacco! Lovely flowers for the bees, Miss Molly. Why, the honey might be soporific."

"I should like to have bees, too, in time," put in Molly.

"Ah yes, in time, in time. Feed them on heather and mignonette, to say nothing of the tobacco. That mountain over there, I should make his flanks golden with mignonette as his head is purple with heather. There is a lad over there who sees things as I do. You ought to know him, Miss Molly,—Hughie Sinclair of the Glen. He is outstripping me. We can't grow wheat against the immense wheat-growing districts of Arizona and Southern Russia. The rain comes at the worst possible moment for the hay, and threshes the oats as with a flail. Cattle and sheep are all very well, but it is no industry to put the beasts on the land and let

it fatten them. I see Ireland a garden, a garden and an orchard."

"I'm afraid I am keeping you," said Molly, with compunction. "It is so delightful to listen, but these are business hours, and Mrs. Sweeney at the Creggs Arms —she used to be cook at Creggs—will have lunch ready for me at one o'clock. I promised my aunts to be home by daylight, and it took me two hours to get to Ballinamona."

"It won't take you half an hour when you have the new light railway. God bless Mr. Balfour! He's not an Irishman, but he deserves to be. It makes such industries as these we have been talking about possible."

"Aunt Thisbe will never forgive him," said Molly, with a roguish smile.

"He'll make her niece's fortune," replied Mr. Beecham, with an answering twinkle. "But you are quite right, Miss Molly. We must get to business. Presently, when your violets are grown, I shall lend you Eily Laffan. I sent her a voyage to Scilly to learn what was to be learnt there. One of the biggest growers is a great friend of mine. Eily will teach you how to pack the flowers safely and to the greatest advantage."

"I should think my sisters might consent to help at that."

"So they might, Miss Molly. It's work for delicate hands."

"I smell them already,"—Molly put up her brown finger-tips to her pink nostrils. "How one's hands will smell after packing! I shall learn all that Eily has to teach, and shall teach Oonagh and Nora."

Mr. Beecham had selected another thin catalogue from a bundle.

"This is 'Violets,'" he said. "I have placed on the cover, 'That which above all others yields the sweetest smell in the air is the violet: especially the

white double violet, which comes twice a year, about the middle of April and about Bartholomew-tide.' By the way, Bacon doesn't mention among his most sweet-smelling things violet roots. You shall know how delicious they are in winter."

A moment more and they were engaged in a discussion of practical matters: roots, bulbs, gardening tools, compost, manures, what not, was all their talk. The selection of things was to be left to Mr. Beecham. Molly had but to get the ground in order, and there were willing hands to help her at that. She could have half a dozen ragged urchins and welcome from the village which stood outside the gates of Creggs. "Sure, what were they doing?" said their mothers; "only gettin' into mischief, and no place for them at all except to frighten crows on a farm with a gun"—a form of employment which was much sought after by the youth of the neighbourhood, but did not commend itself to the mothers.

After the business part of the interview was over Molly strolled out with Mr. Beecham to see the houses and admire his splendid grapes and tomatoes, and the cucumbers which hung, oddly like green snakes, from the low-roofed houses.

They made many pauses. Molly knew the place pretty well—the garden with its pond full of gold-fish, its great old cedars, its winding walks and sequestered arbours. Yet there was always so much to admire. And Mr. Beecham's apt quotations were delightful to listen to: his comments so much to the point. He was murmuring to himself the magnificent music of Wordsworth's great ode, with a passing comment to the effect that the Intimations of Immortality had come to him in age instead of childhood, only half of which Molly understood, when she looked at her watch and found it was one o'clock.

"I must fly," she said. "Bridget—Mrs. Sweeney—will be so put out if my lunch is spoilt."

"And I have been keeping you with my prosing," he said regretfully.

"Your poetising," corrected Molly. "I must learn some of it to say to myself when I am working out-of-doors."

"You won't need it then. You'll have the world-poetry at your ears. 'There's day and night, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon, and stars, all sweet things; there's likewise a wind on the heath,'" he quoted from Lavengro.

There was a tall young man coming towards them along the path between the tomato plants, with the pale autumnal sun on his rather massive figure in its suit of grey homespuns. A great white Newfoundland with a few black spots lumbered majestically at his heels.

"Ah, Hughie!" said Mr. Beecham, affectionately. "I did not know you were in town. May I do my friend the honour, Miss Molly? Mr. Hugh Sinclair, Miss De La Poer. I have been telling Miss De La Poer how you've taken up the flower-growing. She is going to follow your example. We shan't be a congested district once this idea spreads."

The young man lifted his hat at the introduction, and looked at Molly with interested eyes. They were pleasant eyes, brown and deep in a good square face. The head was somewhat massive to match the figure, with fine broad brows, and hair slightly curling.

After Molly had gone away and left the two men together, she thought upon Hugh Sinclair and how her heart had leaped up as she heard his name. There were Sinclairs of her mother's family; so much Molly knew, although her Aunt Thisbe had discouraged Molly's asking questions about her mother's family, and little by little the girl had ceased to ask them. If this was a

cousin of hers, how strange it would be that she should meet him just here at the threshold of her new life. She would ask Bridget Sweeney. Bridget Sweeney would know. "Blood is thicker than water, blood is thicker than water." Molly said the words to herself like a refrain as she made her way to the Creggs Arms.

CHAPTER V

"WHO IS MR. HUGH SINCLAIR?"

THE Creggs Arms was a modest little hostelry. It had to compete with a big brand-new hotel in the loveliest of the valleys between the mountains, owned by a syndicate and with everything up to date, at least in intention.

That big hotel was a source of great annoyance to Mrs. Sweeney, and she was sure to retail gossip to its disadvantage as soon as she had Molly comfortably established at her lunch.

Not that the Creggs Arms suffered very much. The old clients never deserted it. What though the coffee-room had a clay floor, and the waiting-maid waited in her bare feet! The plain cooking was excellent. The waiting-maid, Nannie, was as pretty as a picture in her pink cotton bodice and skirt, and her pink legs and feet. He would be the veriest curmudgeon who could object to Nannie, and, as a matter of fact, no one ever did object. The hostess was kindness and honesty itself, and everything was clean and sweet, if somewhat primitive.

Commercial travellers hardly ever got as far as Ballinamona, and, when they did, either put up at the big hotel or at Flanagan's Commercial, which was simply a public-house with a bedroom or two over it, and the parlour at the back of the shop for eating-room.

The *clientèle* of the Creggs Arms was really a genteel

one, as Thisbe knew when she consented to her niece lunching there. A cast-away School Inspector or an official of the Congested Districts Board, an organiser of the Home Industries Association, or an Inspector of the Board of Agriculture—there was usually one or other of these in the best bedroom. Occasionally Mrs. Sweeney received guests who were dissatisfied with the big hotel, and those were proud moments in her life.

However, the coffee-room, such as it was, was not sufficiently good nor retired enough for Miss Molly. Her luncheon-table was set in Mrs. Sweeney's best parlour, with the flowery paper on the walls, the china dogs on the mantelpiece, the eight-day clock ticking in the corner, and the little table drawn close to the fire.

Molly seated herself with satisfaction. The mountain air had made her hungry, and from her window on the second floor of the Creggs Arms she could see right away down the hilly street to the Lough, which was like an inland sea, with its many islands.

The meal was a very feminine one, for it was flanked by the tea-tray. Molly was as fond of tea at all hours as her peasant forbears, and it was the greater treat to her now because Aunt Thisbe would have no such unbecoming intrusion of the tea hour into the lunch and dinner hour. Mrs. Sweeney knew Miss Molly's ways; and it was with a feeling of unwonted revelry that Molly saw, beyond the little bright dish-cover that masked her *plat* of a tiny chicken and a bit of bacon, the green and white tea-cups with bunches of tulips tied with blue ribbon that Mrs. Sweeney had inherited from her mother-in-law. She turned away from the excellent bottle of claret which the Creggs Arms could still produce. The Creggs Arms was supposed yet to have some of the French wines of old smuggling days. Molly was too young, too used to spare living, to appreciate the wine. Tea was ever so much nicer, according to Molly.

The meal was a rustic and honest one. The chicken and bacon were accompanied by fresh cabbage from the garden, boiled as the Irish know how to boil it, with the bacon, and floury potatoes smiling through their jackets. Molly did full justice to it; and when she had left only a plateful of scraps for Pincher the rough terrier, who lay watching her wistfully from the hearthrug, she set to with the appetite of her outdoor life and her twenty years upon the hot buttered cakes and heather honey that accompanied the tea.

Nannie waited on her demurely, her lashes down on her pretty cheeks and her hands folded when she was not actively employed.

Molly chattered right through the meal. She had the easy intimacy of the Irish with their dependants and inferiors; but Nannie wasn't to be coaxed out of her shyness beyond "Aye, indeed, your ladyship," "Sure enough, your ladyship," and such expressions of agreement.

However, with the disappearance of what had been the chicken and all its accompaniments Nannie vanished, and her place was taken by Mrs. Sweeney herself, who stood beaming broadly upon "her young lady" as though she were the pleasantest thing upon earth in Mrs. Sweeney's eyes, as doubtless she was, and must have been very pleasant to any eyes that gazed on her.

"You've a new dress, Miss Molly," Mrs. Sweeney began. "Long may you wear it! 'Tis yourself looks nate and purty in it. A sweet waist you have, jewel."

Molly laughed.

"I'm glad you like it, Bridget," she said, "and my appearance in it. It's tailor-made; I got it down from Dublin. It was a little present from myself to myself."

"It becomes you, then. The blue of it just matches the blue of your eyes. But tailor-made, did you say?

Don't go for to tell me, Miss Molly, that ladies is measured for their clothes by min, for that's something I couldn't believe."

"They are, then," said Molly, enjoying herself. "Of course, I wasn't measured for this personally. I got what they call a self-measurement form."

"Don't trouble to tell me that, Miss Molly," said Mrs. Sweeney, coming out of what was apparently a trance of prayer. "Sure my ladies would rather die than do the like. But you tell me there's some that does it. They must be brazen-faces. Sure I've heard some o' them are wearin' trousers, glory be! 'Twas George read it to me off the *Dunderry Sentinel*. 'Give over your tricks, man,' says I. 'It's gospel truth,' says he. I was nigh hand faintin'. George had to help me on to the sofa."

"Ladies really do wear knickerbockers for bicycling,' Molly assured her. "They're very convenient. You know, after all, ladies always wore those things under their habits for riding."

"And wore their habits to the ground so that they were helpless as babbies, an' sure to be kilt dead if the horse ran away with them, rather than let mortial suspect what they wore. But them that wears them other things—not ladies, Miss Molly?"

Molly could hardly resist the entreaty in Mrs. Sweeney's eye, but she answered truthfully—

"Some ladies do. In fact, the lady that introduced the fashion is an Irish lady."

"St. Patrick 'll disown her," said Mrs. Sweeney fiercely.

"They're very convenient, you know," began Molly.

"You never would!" cried Mrs. Sweeney, rolling her eyes.

Molly made haste to assure her.

"I'll go no further than very short skirts," she said.

"And why not with the pair of ankles you've on you?" said Mrs. Sweeney, recovering herself with amazing rapidity. "But sure, Miss Molly, I was gettin' rale vexed wid that ould oddity, Mr. Beecham, for keepin' you so long. I was afraid the chicken 'ud be boiled to babby-rags. And I was watchin' the kittle so that it 'ud be just on the first boil to make the tay. I know it's wan o' Quality's notions to have their tay like that. I hope yours is to your liking, miss."

"It's delicious," said Molly, truthfully. "There's a great pot of it here still. Won't you have a cup?"

"'Deed, then, it's a thing I never refuse," assented Mrs. Sweeney, watching Molly pour her out a cup of tea. "Sure I'm drinkin' it all day long. Thank you kindly, Miss Molly, honey. Sure 'tis too good you are, pourin' it out for me yourself."

She sipped it in silence for a second or two.

"You're sure it's as you like it?" she asked, making a little grimace.

"Why, you know it is, Bridget. Isn't it to your liking?"

"It seems a bit watery, Miss Molly, to me. I suppose I miss the taste of the pot. The little brown pot's out there now sittin' in the ashes, and 'tis never empty from week's end to week's end. . . . 'Tis very heartenin' the tay it does make."

"Glory be to goodness," exclaimed Molly, gaily. "We may be down in the world, but we've beautiful digestions."

"I don't know anything about mine," said Mrs. Sweeney, still sipping. "I never felt it. Maybe I haven't got one."

"Not to feel it is the surest sign that you have it, you dear soul," said Molly.

"See that now!" Mrs. Sweeney's air was full of simple admiration. "'Tisn't everything you know

you've got by missin' it; is it, Miss Molly? And more betoken, ye'll have done a dale o' business wid Mr. Beecham. Yez'll be thinkin' of stockin' the gardens maybe?"

"Not that, Bridget. The gardens will have to do as they are till money comes to Creggs again. I'm going to grow flowers for my living."

Mrs. Sweeney gazed at her with stupefaction.

"You can't ate flowers, Miss Molly," she said.

"No, but I'll sell them, and buy food and other things with the proceeds. Haven't you heard of flower-growing as a business?"

"Indeed, I've heard tell of it. Mr. Hugh Sinclair of the Glen . . . but there, sure he's born to it, to the land, I mane. 'Tisn't likely wan of your name 'ud know anything about it. 'Tis makin' your clothes dirty an' muckin' your feet you'd be, an' trapesin' home to Miss Thisbe with a cowld on ye fit to kill ye. Let alone maybe hurtin' yourself wid them spades an' things. A fork is a very unchancy thing to hit you if flung from the top of a hayrick. I knew a man was kilt by it myself when I was a girl. To be sure he'd drink took, an'——"

"I shan't have anything to do with hayricks," interrupted Molly, not wishing to hear anything further in this pessimistic vein. "And besides, Bridget, why shouldn't I have a practical turn and know something about the land? My grandfather O'Neill——"

It was Molly's turn to be interrupted.

"Whisper now, dear," said Mrs. Sweeney, in a coaxing voice; "don't be talkin' about such things. Sure Miss Thisbe wouldn't like it at all. You're a De La Poer, dear, that's what you are."

"And an O'Neill," said Molly, with decision. "You silly Bridget, I like just as much to be an O'Neill as a De La Poer."

"The O'Neills are a fine dacent family, and had the

good blood as everybody knows. Didn't it show in her ladyship? Did she ever look as if she wasn't born to it? I beg your pardon, honey. I'm afeard my foolish ould tongue is runnin' away with me. You wor sayin'——"

Molly ignored this polite attempt to turn the conversation.

"I hope I'll be an O'Neill when I get between the drills of violets. But you're quite wrong. Papa would never have objected——"

"His lordship was terrible proud. He could take off his hat to pride in another. It was the good blood he thought of, and he didn't care if he was atin' potaties wid a pinch o' salt to them an' drinkin' a noggin o' milk at a poor man's table as long as you didn't ask him to sit down wid them that got their money by low manes. Indeed he was a terrible simple gentleman. Still, I wouldn't be talkin' about O'Neills, dearie. Yez have always been divided; an' their ways isn't yours. Let well alone, Miss Molly."

"You're a very silly old person!" repeated Molly, in a discouraged voice. She had been on the verge of asking Mrs. Sweeney about the O'Neills and Sinclairs, and what branches there yet survived of her mother's family over there beyond the mountain.

"You are very silly," she said, and a sulky shadow fell over her bright face.

"Well, then, I am," agreed Mrs. Sweeney, watching her fondly. "But tell me now, agra: when are the beautiful bachelors coming after Miss Oonagh and Miss Nora?"

"No bachelors ever will come to Creggs," answered Molly, recovering her brightness. "We shall be five lonely old ladies together. You will see. Aunt This and Aunt Pen will live to a hundred and five, like Lady Eleanor De La Poer. They won't look much older at

the last than myself at sixty and Oonagh and Nora at sixty-eight and seventy."

"The heavens forbid!" ejaculated Mrs. Sweeney, piously. "But sure 'tis only your jokes, Miss Molly. 'Tis quiet at Creggs, I'll allow, but the husband will find you out if you're hid in a band-box. See George now: he buried three women before he came after me, and I kep' him twenty years waitin' after because I was so fond o' the family and was afeard they'd be neglected when I wint. Yet sure we wor married in spite of all them obstacles. Is there any talk of the new lord comin', dear?"

Mrs. Sweeney narrowed her eyes, and watched Molly's face curiously as she asked the question.

"The present Lord Creggs? Oh, he won't come. Heaven forbid! What should we do with him, a fine gentleman like him? He's very rich, you know, Bridget. Rich people don't come to Creggs."

"The more shame for him not to divide wid yez!"

"Oh, we've no claim at all," laughed Molly. "You see, the money came to that branch of the family through an English grandmother. Lord Creggs has really dealt handsomely with us. Only for his forbearance we wouldn't be inhabiting Creggs at all. He could turn us out to-morrow. Instead he has very handsomely indicated to us that he has no desire to disturb us."

"An' he had no curiosity to see yez, Miss Molly, his own cousins?"

"If he has he has kept it in check. There has been no suggestion of his visiting Creggs."

"That would be because his lordship, God rest him, was bad friends wid the father. Well, you'll excuse me, Miss Molly, axin'. 'Tis only because I love the ground yez walks on that I makes so bould. He'd be a lovely match for Miss Oonagh. I'd like to see a diamond

crown sittin' on top of her head. She'd become it, so she would."

"If we were of your religion we might all go into convents," said Molly.

"The Lord forbid!" said Mrs. Sweeney, piously.

Molly heard her with dancing eyes.

"Well, Bridget, I think I must be going. I'll take a long time to get home. It has been so pleasant to see you, and I have enjoyed my lunch. By the way, tell me: who is Mr. Hugh Sinclair? You spoke of him a minute or two ago."

"Did I now, indeed? My tongue trips me up. He's a—a gentleman livin' th' other side o' the Lough. What would you be wantin' to know about him for?"

"Well, I've just met him at Mr. Beecham's, and I believe he's interested in the flower-growing. I thought I should like to know him better."

Mrs. Sweeney muttered something which might have been a malediction on Mr. Beecham.

"Miss Molly," she said earnestly, "Mr. Sinclair is a very respected—gentleman, but not your sort at all. Don't be takin' it into your head that bekase you're goin' to amuse yourself over them flowers you can talk to any gentleman you come across. You won't mind old Bridget sayin' it to you, honey? There's only trouble when one class mixes with another. I've nothin' at all but the greatest of good to say of Mr. Sinclair, but he's not your class, Miss Molly; he's not your class at all. Sure, what was Mr. Beecham thinkin' of? He has the quare ideas, I know, about what's gintry an' what's not. But sure you couldn't expect him to know. I remember th' ould grandfather. If he was alive now he'd be a hundred and twelve. He'd be a proud ould man if he'd known the grandson 'ud go to college an' be book-larned an' took up by the gintry.

"Still, book-larnin' is not gintry, though it's a fine thing, Miss Molly."

"Aunt Thisbe trained you, didn't she, Bridget?" asked Molly, as she put on her hat before the speckled little glass over the fireplace.

"She did, acushla: took me whin I was a red-shanked slip of a child, an' put me under Mrs. Connor, the cook. Many a time she talked to me. She's not proud with the poor people. None of the family ever is. An' though I was cook after, many a little odd job I done for herself."

"You're a credit to her training," said Molly, with an innocent air.

CHAPTER VI

THE GARDENER MOLLY

The months turned round to March, and Molly's violet farm was an accomplished fact. Soon she would pack her first consignment for Dublin under the tutelage of Eily Laffan. The plants selected for her by Mr. Beecham, the white double violet, the great purple or heartsease violet, the blue or lavender freaked violet, were all hardy and productive.

Molly had come to love the work more even than she had hoped. In time she would persuade Oonagh and Nora to take an interest, to assist in the packing which would be done over there in a lean-to house at the back of the semi-ruined ranges of stabling which had cost the late Lord Creggs' father a monstrous sum considering the state of the Creggs finances. But then it was in the time of the great famine, and employment had to be found for the people: it was better than building an obelisk for an eyesore to the country, as Sir John Mansfield's father had done.

Molly had always been friends with the open air, though she had seldom wandered beyond the confines of the lands of Creggs; but now she seemed more than ever to belong to it. Nothing in the way of weather short of a thunderstorm kept her indoors. If March was keen, Molly did not feel it, earthing up her violets in the wide field with two or three boys to help her, but feeling as solitary, as far away from her assistants, as the biggest crow in the sky that flew before the others.

Her complexion had not suffered so much as her Aunt Pen had anticipated. In that moist air even the winds of March are not parching, and the splendid health which the outdoor life gave her added as much to her beauty in one way as it could take from its delicacy in another.

Mrs. Lambert had been delighted with Molly's new departure—had even urged, to the amazement of the young ladies themselves, that Oonagh and Nora should take a spade—a delicate ladylike spade—or hoe in their hand and help Molly at the flower-farming.

"It will preserve your figures and complexions," she said bluntly. "You are both getting a little too waxen, too ethereal, while Molly looks as though she had bathed her face in May-dew, and her fine straight young body in the very fountain of beauty."

But she could not persuade the sisters. They looked out at the grey day: the wind was in the east. They had none of Molly's joy in hard weather whenever she could get it.

"It is so much nicer here," Oonagh said, with a little shiver, spreading her fingers to the blaze: "perhaps when summer comes."

"Molly says that the violets have all tucked themselves under their leaves," added Nora. "See, here is a bunch of them! They had no sweetness when they came in: it had all been pinched out of them."

"They are sweet enough now," said Mrs. Lambert. "The room smells of them. Delightful Molly! She walks scented with violets, and carries them in her eyes. Well, girls, I hope it will not be too cold for you to dine with me on Thursday."

"It won't be at all too cold," said Oonagh, smiling, while Nora made haste to second her.

"You'd better take the steam tram, abominable thing! I'd send the brougham for you only the new horse won't face the tram yet. It would be as much as your lives are worth to meet it. Wilkins takes him to see it pass every day, trying to get him used to it. But it's rather slow work."

"I'm not surprised," said Miss Thisbe. The steam tram was one of the few subjects on which she and Mrs. Lambert were agreed. "I always feel inclined to shy myself when I see it. Jerry is as bad as your new horse. We've been obliged to give up taking him that road altogether."

"That would suit Jerry exactly, I should think," laughed Mrs. Lambert. "He's the very moral of his father for laziness. You remember the old Jerry, Thisbe, how he used to turn round and take you home when he found that you contemplated going further than Castle Lambert?"

"He was very wise," said Miss Thisbe, with a sigh to the memory of her dead favourite. She always contrasted the ways of young Jerry, now pushing up to a venerable age, disadvantageously with those of his father.

"Molly too, mind!" said Mrs. Lambert. "I want all the girls, Thisbe. For a wonder, I've got three bachelors for them."

Penelope privately thought this remark indelicate; but she had grown used to Mrs. Lambert's ways, and even attached to the lady as Thisbe was, although Mrs. Lambert and she would always disagree on most things.

In the matter of this invitation now; Thisbe did not altogether like her nieces going unchaperoned even to Castle Lambert; yet the wind was in the east, and the recent damp weather had so brought on her rheumatism that there could be no question of her venturing from the house. And Pen was laid up with a cold: not that Pen could be anything but a figure-head of a chaperon, her sister thought disdainfully. Mrs. Lambert had never seemed to consider that the girls required a chaperon at all, and it was not a matter Thisbe cared to argue out with her.

"Now I'm going to see my pet, Molly," Mrs. Lambert announced. "I haven't seen Molly for ages. I shall find her on the farm, I suppose?"

"At the foot of the Ten Acre Field, where her daffodils are coming into bud. I can see her from the window," said Oonagh.

"Let me send for Molly," suggested Thisbe. "The clay is heavy after the recent rain. You will get muddy and so tired. Not that you mind that. We were brought up differently. I can't get used to the new ways."

Mrs. Lambert laughed.

"I don't let my carriage make a lazy woman of me," she said. "I walk with John every day. I did six miles on Tuesday. Very creditable for sixty-five." It made Penelope shudder to hear the reckless way Mrs. Lambert talked about ages. "I believe feet were made for walking, not for putting on a footstool. Look at my brogues!"

"As though we needed to look at her brogues!" said Thisbe later, while they watched Mrs. Lambert's portly figure tramping steadily down the headland of the Ten Acre Field. "Don't we hear them all over the place? And can't we see the marks of the nails on the polished floors?"

"We do indeed, Thisbe," assented Penelope. "Yet she is a most good-natured kind friend. Tuesday—that was the day she walked six miles. Do you remember that it was Tuesday afternoon she lent us the carriage to go call on Lady Mansfield?"

"Of course she is kind," said Thisbe, testily. "You aren't more attached to her nor aware of her really good qualities than I am. Still, at her age, one expects more repose. She would rout all the world out of its chimney corners if she could."

"Sixty-five is not so very old," said Penelope, timidly.

Thisbe forbore to answer sharply, though a sharp answer formed itself upon her tongue.

Meanwhile Mrs. Lambert had enfolded Molly in a warm embrace, not giving her time to deposit the basket on her arm, in which lay a swathe of half-opened daffodil buds with their long spears, nor to remove her gardening gloves which were heavy with clay.

"How good of you to tramp all down that long headland," Molly said: "and it is so dirty too."

"Never mind! I wanted to see you at work. I liked the look of you, Molly, as I saw you from afar off. A solitary figure you made against the grey sky: and though your aunts think I'm the most prosaic person in the world, I've an eye for the poetry of things. There's something of poetry in a lonely figure against the sky amid fields, isn't there, Molly? Especially if it stands doing nothing as you were doing when I first caught sight of you."

"Was I doing nothing? I didn't keep doing nothing when I saw you, did I now?"

"Of course you didn't. You ran to welcome me as you've always done. I'm so fond of you, child. I wish you'd take poor Jarvis, and then I could feel that you were something of my own."

Molly laughed, and, flinging her garden gloves into a basket which stood at her feet, she put an arm about Mrs. Lambert's shoulders.

"I don't want to marry any one," she said. "I want to succeed with my farm. But I am as much your own as you want me to be. It's inhospitable, but you must come right back to the house. You'll be getting rheumatism like Aunt Thisbe. Yes, I know. You wear strong boots and Jaeger clothing and all the rest of it, but the wind's keen and the clay clings. You're not as low as my violets. See, the daffodils feel it a bit. Do you see the little pinched line along the edge of the grasses? You are going to take this bunch, the very first I have gathered of my own growing, home to Mr. Lambert."

"John will be delighted. But you treat me like an old woman," said Mrs. Lambert, permitting Molly to lead her across the field. "I'm not going back. I've said good-bye to the aunts. I told Wilkins to wait for me at the gate by the wood. You're coming to see me on Thursday, my dear; I've got over, by ignoring them, the scruples of Thisbe, who would have kept you all at home because the east wind had found out her bones. She wouldn't argue it with me. Come over early by the steam tram, and bring your frocks. I'll send you back in the brougham after the last tram has gone."

"That will be delightful," said Molly.

"Have you a pretty frock, child? I've three bachelors coming. I could see that Pen didn't like me to mention it before Oonagh and Nora. She thought it indelicate. Thisbe has more sense. I believe Pen blushed at my rude frankness. I wonder why Pen never had a bachelor of her own? She must have been pretty once, as pretty as Thisbe was handsome."

"And pray who are the bachelors in this bachelorless country?" asked Molly, laughing. "You notice my

indelicate curiosity? Your nephew—I didn't know he was here."

"He comes back like the moth after the candle, poor fellow. Yes—he came two days ago. He and John are out with the hounds to-day. Then there are Lord Carbery and a friend of his, a Mr. Jocelyn. They were at Christ Church and Eton together."

"I wonder if they know our cousin, the present Lord Creggs? He was at Eton and Christ Church, and he must have been a contemporary of Lord Carbery's about."

"You must ask them, my dear."

"I should be afraid if Oonagh or Nora were within hearing. They might be Aunt Thisbe's daughters, if she ever had any daughters, which of course she hasn't. Aunt Thisbe rules them with a rod of iron. Aunt Pen is only her echo. Why shouldn't we be friends with the present Lord Creggs? It isn't his fault that he was born a boy and we only girls. Papa disliked the thought of him, but it was a tradition handed on to him from his father that the De Vere De La Poers were the enemy. Of course he didn't like having no heir either, dear papa. I wish I could have been an heir to please him."

Molly concluded with a sudden little quiver of the face and the flash of tears in her eyes, which her father's name always brought there.

"If papa had met the young man he would have asked him to dinner: I'm sure he would," she went on. "And he'd have liked him. He always did ask people to dinner even when there was nothing in the larder. And he always liked them when they were well-bred."

"He did indeed," assented Mrs. Lambert, with a sigh. She had been very fond of the late Lord Creggs.

"And Lord Creggs would be sure to be well-bred," said Molly.

"Thisbe is rather stupid about it," said Mrs. Lambert, with some irritation.

"Especially as she flavours her dislike with reverence for the head of the family. If she heard that Lord Creggs was coming to-morrow she'd put on her finest satin and what is left of her mother's diamonds to receive him in."

They were in sight now of the top of Wilkins's cockade, and could see through the leafless wood the glitter of the horse's accoutrements.

"Tell me, Molly," said Mrs. Lambert, with an affectionate glance at her favourite, "before I go, what you were thinking of so intently before you saw me."

"What should I be thinking of," answered Molly, with an effort after lightness, "but whether it would be a good season for flowers in Dublin this year?"

"But I don't think she was thinking of that," said Mrs. Lambert to herself, as she was carried swiftly over the smooth roads, made in the famine time and requiring so little keeping because of the scant traffic. A visit to Creggs meant a long détour if the steam tram was to be avoided. "I don't think she *was* thinking of that. It is an ominous sign when a frank creature like Molly takes to equivocation and day-dreaming. Who could it be?—in this bachelorless country, as she said. I wish it might be my poor Jarvis!"

Jarvis was the son of the Violet whom, a quarter of a century before, Mrs. Lambert had destined to be Lady Creggs, when there was no question of the milkmaid, and the unkind turn that Love or Fate was going to do the aunts for the second time. Poor Violet had died the year after her marriage, leaving the infant son, who had become very dear to his grand-aunt. The big family of those early days had somehow all disappeared or been absorbed beyond Mrs. Lambert's reach. And so on this one of her kin she lavished almost motherly love.

By all accounts he deserved it, this serious, very English young man who had been born with a fine golden spoon in his mouth, and was, according to his great-aunt, the ideal employer, squire, landlord, country gentleman. The big concerns with which he had to do kept him at home for the most part. But he would have liked adventure and its consequent hardships if he had not been an only son and the pivot on which so much turned.

He had always been a swain of Molly's since he had eft behind him the age at which girls are not considered ; and he had kept on with a great persistence while the young lady alternately laughed at and coquetted with him.

"When there is some one else I will clear out," he had been used to say, when Molly refused him. "But while there is no one else there is as good a chance for me as another."

CHAPTER VII

NEW ACQUAINTANCES

The three young ladies made the journey to Castle Lambert by the detestable steam tram, carrying each her belongings in a large pasteboard box.

"I wonder whether Mr. Jarvis Anson will be at the end of the road to meet us, and whether he will mind the boxes very much if he is?" said Oonagh, as they waited for the arrival of the tram.

"Not he," said Molly. "Being an Englishman he won't have any self-consciousness about the things. If he were Irish he'd suspect that all the passengers were grinning at his discomfiture and waiting to see him shoulder his burdens."

"We ought to carry them ourselves," said Nora.

"They're not proper things for a gentleman, and he is always so carefully dressed. I don't suppose he'd hear of our doing it, though."

"He'd carry a cabbage down Piccadilly," concluded Molly, "if he took a fancy to the vegetable. That's the way with the Englishman. He never cares what people are thinking about him."

Oonagh and Nora sniffed delicately. They had the prejudices of the Anglo-Irish which are to the Celtic as wine to water.

However, Mr. Anson had his wits about him. He did load himself up with the three milliner's boxes, despite his Poole-cut coat with the gardenia in it and his immaculate trousers, despite the delighted faces pressed against the tram windows. It would never have struck him that he could be the cause of their amusement. Nor would he have cared if he had known it. But as the tram whisked out of sight he deposited the boxes on the grass plot by the side of the road with dignity.

"I should have been delighted to carry them," he explained, "but Aunt Mary ordered the little cart to fetch your luggage. She would have been very glad to send the carriage too, but she said you insisted on walking. Ah, here is the cart now."

He put the boxes into the cart when it reached them, listening with a quiet smile to Molly's adjurations to the urchin in charge to be careful.

"Never fear, Miss Molly, never fear!" the small, red-headed child answered, with a reassuring grin. The servants and all the dependants at Castle Lambert knew Molly as well as did those at Creggs, and were almost equally devoted to her.

After the walk between the bare hedgerows full of song and the atmosphere full of the living scents of the spring, they found Mrs. Lambert awaiting them impatiently in her drawing-room, with just such an

abundant tea-table as had offended Thisbe in the remote past.

"I felt I couldn't have waited another minute," she said. "I was so afraid Thisbe wouldn't let you, after all, travel by that democratic conveyance, the steam tram. Then I heard Molly's laugh above the song of the blackbird out there in the shrubbery. It was a great relief."

Her nephew looked at his watch.

"We did the distance in very good time, Aunt Mary," he said. "Twenty minutes is not too much."

"There speaks the Englishman," she laughed. "I'd have said just the same when I was married to John first. As though every minute isn't an hour when one wants any one to come very much."

"You mean that it seems an hour?" he said soberly. "But if you had looked at the clock!"

"Oh, Jarvis, Jarvis! I wonder if any one could ever make you as Irish as your uncle John has made me after forty years of companionship?"

"Some persons might, if they tried," he replied with imperturbable gravity.

Mrs. Lambert was meanwhile chafing the slender cold fingers of Oonagh and Nora alternately. She was very fond of the girls, just ceasing to be girls, who would never lose the austere innocence of childhood. Molly was her darling, but in another way she yearned over the sisters, with their impracticable pride which yet was so full of high-mindedness, their delicate ignorance of the world and its ways, their simplicity and their angelic looks.

"I'm not sure," she had said to her husband only that morning, "that any man is really good enough for them. I think if I was their mother I couldn't bear to give them up to any man. Molly now——"

"I thought you were planning matches for them with

Carbery and the other man?" said Mr. Lambert from amid the cloud of shaving lather on his rosy face.

"Why, so I am, you great stupid!" answered his wife. "I was only saying that if I was their mother——"

"I know; that you couldn't bear to marry them to any one. Carbery is an uncommonly good fellow, and not poor as Irish landlords go; and his friend's looks speak for him. Of course we don't know anything about him, but he is Carbery's friend and has a place in . . . I don't quite know where he has a place. Somewhere in the south of England. I don't know why you should object to such matches for those girls, even if you were their mother, especially seeing that you're so keen to bring them together."

Mr. Lambert was rallying his wife as he was fond of doing; but he was deterred by the sudden quivering of her still comely face, the roses of which were unwithered in the sixties.

"I was only talking about if they were my children. The Lord didn't think me worthy to be the mother of any one, but——"

"As for worth," said her husband, wiping his razor and putting it away, "you'd have made the best mother in the world. I thought you'd given up fretting over that old grief, Mary,—consoled yourself with your god-daughter Molly, eh? Never mind, darling: children often break hearts by their presence more than their absence. They turn out badly——"

"If the Lord had seen fit to give me mine they wouldn't have turned out badly," said Mrs. Lambert, with an obstinacy which there was no gainsaying.

But to return to the tea-hour in the drawing-room. Molly's sisters ate poorly. Molly herself had the appetite of the gardener. Mr. Anson watched her with fascinated eyes as she tried one after the other of the little piles

of sandwiches and returned again to the hot buttered tea-cakes.

"John says these afternoon teas are a vile institution," said Mrs. Lambert, who was fond of quoting her husband, perhaps because she had so few other people to quote. "I never found they did me any harm, I could always eat my dinner after them."

"And I," said Molly. "It makes a difference when you are out-of-doors."

After a chat by the fireside in the hour before the lamps were lit, Mrs. Lambert took the girls away to their bedroom to dress.

"Let me see what frocks you've got to do honour to the occasion," she said. "Ah!" The frocks lay glittering across the great bed. The candles had been lit in the sconces by the Sheraton dressing-glass and before the girandoles on the wall. "The white satins. That explains the air of subdued excitement which you have been wearing, you two girls. And Molly's lavender satin. Couldn't be better. You will be able to choose your flowers from this great bowlful Sanders has sent in. He knew that Molly was coming. Molly is a great favourite with Sanders. What flowers shall you wear, child?"

"These," said Molly, picking out some purple irises with yellow streaks. "A bunch on each shoulder. I have my amethyst brooch. And daffodils for Oonagh, and this one delightful dark rose for Nora."

Mrs. Lambert might well be proud of "her girls," as she liked to call them, when they came into the drawing-room presently. There was a masculine group on the hearthrug. Mr. Lambert came forward and kissed Molly while he raised her sisters' hands to his lips. Besides Mr. Anson, there was Lord Carbery whom they knew, and there was a slim, boyish person, with an eager, handsome face and a quick deprecating smile, whom

Molly liked the instant she saw him. She found herself talking to him at dinner. He had taken in Mrs. Lambert, and she had fallen to Jarvis; but Jarvis was a silent person always, and doubly so at meal-time, and he did not seem to mind Molly's attention being a good deal engrossed by her neighbour on the other side.

Yes, Mr. Jocelyn was staying with Carbery at Athclea. The most extraordinary chance in the world. He had been Carbery's fag at Eton and they were friends at Christ Church—old Carbery was no end of a good sort—but they had somehow lost sight of each other. He had not an idea he was in old Carbery's part of the world when he had put up at the Speckled Trout in Drumdoligher, and looked for nothing more enjoyable than a month's trout fishing in the Drum. Then, to his amazement, the very first day whom should he see in the village street walking towards him but old Carbery? who, on his side, thought his whilom fag must have dropped out of the moon. They had been delighted to see each other, of course. Old Carbery had flung his arms about Mr. Jocelyn's neck as a boy might, to the delight of the populace, who had all come to their cabin doors and stood staring and grinning with delight. Miss De La Poer knew Carbery's ways?

Miss De La Poer could imagine them from looking at Lord Carbery himself. His lordship was a red-haired, freckled, blye-eyed young man, with a turned-up nose and a reputation for perfectly harmless wildness.

Well, what did old Carbery do but carry his friend off to Athclea. Mr. Jocelyn hadn't bargained for it. Wasn't prepared a bit to stay in a house with a lady. Only came with a portmanteau. But Carbery would have him, so he had to send off for some togs. Did Miss De La Poer know Miss Aubrey, Lord Carbery's sister?

Molly did.

"Delightful, isn't she?" she asked frankly.

Mr. Jocelyn coloured all over his ingenuous face as though with pleasure.

"I'm so glad you admire her. I do immensely. She's no end of jolly, besides being so pretty. She and Carbery lead me into all kinds of scrapes. We were fishing the other day. She's one of the few girls I know who can be quiet enough to go fishing with. Not but what a man could forgive her if she wasn't. I wasn't getting a rise, and I saw her lifting fish after fish into her basket a little further up. 'Come up here,' she called out, 'and I'll share my good luck with you.' I didn't need a second invitation, I can tell you. I had to jump a barbed wire fence to get to her. Beastly things, aren't they? I've got one or two pots somewhere still for high jumping: and I got over clear. We got two lovely baskets, and I went home as proud as Punch. The next morning at breakfast, after I'd eaten one of the trout, she told me I'd been poaching: we were in the grounds of that new man, Watkins or whatever his name is. He's a man in trade, isn't he? I never know where I am with those two."

"Taking away my character as usual?" called out Lord Carbery, in a cheerful husky voice. "Don't you believe a word he says against me, Miss De La Poer."

"He couldn't tell me anything I don't know already," said Molly, demurely. "You see, we are neighbours, Lord Carbery, as things go."

"Why, of course we are. By the way, my sister is coming over to call on your aunts one afternoon. She had to run up to Dublin this week. But she is going to stay with me now. We think London has had her long enough."

"It was her character I was assailing a moment ago, not yours, Carbery," said Mr. Jocelyn. "I was

telling Miss De La Poer how we fished Mr. Watkins's river."

"I'll let Edie defend herself. Edie did it to take a rise out of Jocelyn. But it wasn't very bad, Miss De La Poer, was it? That very stream we fished rises in our own land: on the mountain over there. If we'd caught the trout a little higher up—I mean a few miles—they would have been ours by right. So they would a little lower down."

"Oh, I'm not shocked," said Molly. "And we shall be delighted to see Miss Aubrey whenever she comes. Aunt Thisbe quite fell in love with her the time she came before, and was sincerely grieved that she must live with your aunt in London instead of here."

"She has decided for herself that our aunt, Lady St. John, has had enough of her society, and that her duty, for a time at least, is to her brother. Wonderful how she enjoys herself, especially since Jocelyn came."

Molly looked at the youth by her side, and decided that he and Miss Aubrey would make a handsome couple.

Lord Carbery's attention had gone back to Nora, whom he had taken in.

"But how strange," said Molly, "that you should have been fishing the Drum. There is so little of it unpreserved. If it had been the Arabeg now. I suppose you were taken in by Timothy Hanlon's advertisement? I know that he advertises the Speckled Trout in one of the English papers, saying there are ten miles of trout fishing. Of course there are, but then they are preserved. Was that what brought you?"

"I suppose it must have been," stammered Mr. Jocelyn, turning very red.

Molly wondered what could have caused his confusion, but put it down to some cause connected with Edith Aubrey. Perhaps there had been an attachment

for some time? But no, he had said that he had stumbled by accident on Athclea.

Pitying his confusion, she looked the other way.

"Don't let Timothy Hanlon get you into trouble anyhow," she said. "You know he sends the unhappy anglers he entices to fish in preserved waters; and when a keeper comes and threatens them, perhaps drives them out without their baskets of fish, and they come back to Timothy very angry, he tells them they must have made a mistake, and sends them off to somewhere else, where the same thing happens all over again."

"Really! I'm glad Timothy didn't play those tricks with me. I suppose Carbery saved me from that. I was only there about twenty-four hours when Carbery picked me up."

"You would have hated it?" said Molly, turning on him sympathetic eyes, which the young man asserted afterwards were really the colour of the flowers at her shoulders.

"I should just think so. I should have killed Mr. Hanlon most likely, though I am a very amiable as well as a law-abiding person."

"They all do hate it, poor things," said Molly, pensively, "especially giving up the fish. Timothy goes on doing it just the same, and can't imagine what they make such a fuss about. It's all a chance, according to Timothy, whether the poaching comes off or not; and though he can't understand their disappointment when it doesn't, he can understand how anybody can object to poaching as poaching, or think it anything but much better sport than the legitimate."

"That is just how Carbery regards it," said Mr. Jocelyn. "And Miss Aubrey, for the matter of that."

CHAPTER VIII

THE STEAM TRAM

It had been really a most successful evening from the girls' point of view, from every one's with a little reservation. Yet Mrs. Lambert could not but acknowledge that Jarvis had not seemed out of it, although that rather presuming young Mr. Jocelyn had monopolised Molly all the evening.

Jarvis had consoled himself with Oonagh.

"Lucky dog," commented Mr. Lambert, "to find such a consolation-prize awaiting him!"

This was said by the dressing-room fire after the guests had taken their departure, and the hosts were talking over things as was their use and habit. Mrs. Lambert often remarked what a Providence it was, and a mysterious one also, that husbands and wives found so much to say to each other. To which Mr. Lambert replied that it was usually done by the husbands repeating old stories to the wives year after year, and the wives, if the marriage was a happy one, pretending to have heard them for the first time. If the wives were not so complaisant, it was incompatibility of temper.

Mrs. Lambert flashed a look at her spouse when he made the remark about the consolation-prize, as though he had suddenly shed a light for her on dark places.

"Oh, John," she said, in an intense voice, "supposing Jarvis should fall in love with Oonagh after all!"

"I didn't know where I was leading you or I wouldn't have made the remark," said Mr. Lambert. "Can't you let the young couples sort themselves out, Mary? Besides——"

"I know what you are going to say . . . that

Oonagh might be capable of refusing Jarvis because his money has been made in business. I hope she wouldn't be so foolish."

Mrs. Lambert, among her many Irish adoptions, had adopted that habit, irritating to the Saxon, of finding words and thoughts for you if your expression is at all slow.

"I've made a good Irishwoman of you, Mary," her spouse said, with saturnine humour. "I was only going to say that I didn't believe Jarvis and Oonagh would suit each other a bit."

"No; I don't suppose they would," assented Mrs. Lambert, regretfully. "But, John dear, did you notice Nora and Carbery? I am as pleased as Punch about that."

"Carbery seemed rather taken with Nora, I admit." Mr. Lambert had the air of doing the handsome thing. "If you could pull that off, Mary, I'd say it was extremely satisfactory, from any point of view except Carbery's sister's. If she has offended old Lady St. John in order to come and live with her brother, she won't thank you for your matrimonial projects."

"It's time for Carbery to settle down," said Mrs. Lambert, with conviction. "The sister's a minx, and only leads him into mischief. Oh, I know you were fetched by her, John. So were all the men for the matter of that. But that only proves her a minx all the more."

Meanwhile the sisters were being carried swiftly along through the pitchy night. The darkness of the night was of that intense kind that comes just before the late moon rises, and to make things blacker, Wilkins, the English coachman, who had lived thirty years in Ireland and adopted Irish ways like his mistress, had forgotten to put candles in the carriage lamps.

The road ran along a valley with mountains on

either hand, and was fringed with trees. Even on a moonlit night the shadows under those trees were of a velvety blackness. It was lucky that they were not likely to meet any conveyance lightless like their own, and that the road was a straight one, which the horse might be trusted to follow of himself.

On one side of the road the mountains began to ascend; on the other, fields descended to a greater depth of valley somewhat precipitously. Strangers in those parts were accustomed to ask if accidents were not of frequent occurrence, since at certain points of the road the lowest of hedges made the only barrier between the solid causeway and the fields below.

There never had been any accidents to speak of. The road was wide; even the steam tram, when it had taken up its share, left still a good space for other traffic. Anyhow, the inhabitants of that part were accustomed to answer, nobody ever fell, and, whenever anybody did, it was soft falling down there on the grass below, glory be to God!

Molly and Oonagh were doing the talking. Nora sat back in her corner of the carriage, her head wrapped up in a little velvet hood, out of which the fairness of her face glimmered even in the dark like a faint moon.

Yet Nora could have contributed to the conversation if she would. Lord Carbery had made so many suggestions for pleasant things to come. How was it they had been so unneighbourly hitherto? the young man had asked. Why, there were enough of themselves to make things very pleasant without bringing in the world. Of course, now Edie had come to live with him, Athclea could be open once more. It was difficult without a lady, and since Edie had broken away, her aunt had cut her off with an angry shilling—after keeping her all those years, too, said the young man

resentfully. He wanted Miss De La Poer to be no end of good friends with Edie. She was such a jolly little thing. How he had missed her in the old days when she had been given up to Aunt Helen!

"There never was anything a boy could do," he had said eagerly, "that Edie wasn't keen after. Oh yes, taking a wasps' nest or fishing with worms for minnows—I had always to put on the bait for her—or climbing trees, or robbing an orchard—though we had plenty of fruit of our own—there was nothing she wasn't game for with her little touzled head. I always think Edie's like a squirrel, she's so bright and shy—but far more mischievous. Oh, a perfect monkey for tricks! Think of her cooped up in Eaton Square! And so staunch! She always took half my lickings. She'd have done anything for me. We had a horrible wretch of a governess. Once when we'd played a trick on her, putting nettles in her bed, Edie took all the blame. I was out of the way at the moment. You should have seen her poor little hands. The woman had struck her with the ruler, giving her my share as well as her own. Then, when I turned up, she wanted to repeat it on me. Edie fought her like a wild cat then. The row even reached the ears of Uncle Thomas, where he sat in the library among his manuscripts, and the woman got her marching orders."

He had talked in this strain during dinner, pretty well all the evening afterwards, to Nora, bringing up old memories, full of harmless egotism as a man like him is apt to be to the woman he is falling in love with. Was Nora bored? Not she. She listened with shining eyes as though she heard the music of the spheres. Mrs. Lambert had left them alone in their corner. She might draw Jocelyn and Jarvis, Molly and Oonagh into the group about the fire. The other pair she discreetly left alone.

Molly chattered of Mr. Jocelyn in heartwhole fashion. She told of the pitfalls he had been led into by Lord Carbery and his sister with great enjoyment.

"I told him it was a cause of pleasure to the national heart to see an Englishman so caught up into lawlessness. He denied he was an Englishman with some heat; and when I asked him if he had an Irish grandmother, he laughed and nodded."

"That is where his animation comes in," said Oonagh. "Now, Mr. Anson could never have had a drop of Irish blood—could he, Molly?"

"To be sure not. He has the calm of the dominant race," laughed Molly. "Even adoption would never make an Irishman of him."

"He is rather scandalised at the Carbery lawlessness," said Oonagh. "He seemed to think that Lord Carbery might get into jail, and what an awful thing that would be."

"As though the Carberys aren't prouder, than anything else in the world, of the Lord Carbery who was in jail, and only saved his neck through the friendship of Charles James Fox."

"I told him about that," said Oonagh. "He seemed to think, oddly enough, that it explained the lawless vein."

"Ah, he'd never understand Carbery's being a staunch Unionist, and yet keeping his great-grandfather's rebel coat and pistols in a glass case like a reliquary. He hasn't got the key to us, though he is Mrs. Lambert's nephew."

"If he had the key," said Oonagh, with unexpected insight, "he'd find that it would only unlock one door. We Irish aren't made of a pattern, and we can't be sure even of one another except that we won't do as any one else in the world might be expected to do in the circumstances."

"You are becoming metaphysical, Oonagh," laughed Molly. She was surprised at the speech, and delighted as one is with some unexpected bit of cleverness in the mouth of a child. She had never credited her sisters with thinking much upon the strange and interesting world around them. Since Molly had been a violet-farmer she had thought much. One does think steadily in those long quiet days in the open air which are as quieting as a seam to the lover of sewing, and far more healthful.

"Where are we now, Molly?" asked Nora.

Molly was credited with seeing in the dark like a cat.

"Just getting into the village. We are approaching the sharp corner by the church."

There was a sudden blare of a steam whistle full upon them, a sudden eye of light blazed into the carriage.

"The steam tram," cried Oonagh and Nora, clinging to each other and hiding their faces.

It was a special steam tram. Mr. Adair, the magistrate, who lived in the next glen over the mountains, had been entertaining that evening, and had chartered a special to take his guests back to the nearest railway station.

The carriage was rocking from side to side. The new horse that would not face the steam tram was backing before the approaching light, wild with terror. The coachman, standing up, was trying to flog him into passing the thing at a gallop, and only adding to his terror.

Molly, sitting still a second, imagined all the circumstances. They would either be under the tram—the horse was backing that way—or be precipitated into the valley below. Better to leap for it. The eye came steadily nearer. The glare of it prevented those in charge of the tram from seeing anything on the dark road in front. Molly opened the door,

"Come," she said to her sisters, "we must only jump for it."

They did not answer her. They had caught at each other's hands, and were holding fast. Oonagh's eyes were closed, her head fallen to one side; she had fainted. Nora sat motionless, as though frozen by the terror of the thing.

"God help us!" said Molly in her own thoughts. "We shall all go together."

She felt the sudden jerk upward of the hind wheels on the raised tram road. The worst had happened. They were going to be under the tram. She saw Wilkins at last give over his vain efforts to flog the horse past the tram, and fling himself from the box. He was at the horse's head. The eye of light was now almost upon them. They were full in its path. She closed her eyes and waited for the crushing death.

Then she felt the carriage suddenly leave the path of the tram—not a second too soon. As it swung out into the safe road again, the great lighted monster swept by them. Molly, opening her eyes, could see the hooded and cloaked ladies, the men, with great coats over their evening clothes, talking unconcernedly inside it. It went on and left everything dark again, except for the glimmer of a lantern in some one's hand.

The horse was standing still now, and trembling so that the carriage shook with his tremors. Molly opened the door and sprang out in the road. There was some one with Wilkins, some one who was holding the lantern, while the coachman talked to the terrified horse. A great white dog was standing by the group, impassive amid all the human agitation.

"Bad luck to the misfortunate steam tram!" said Wilkins, in the vernacular of his adopted country. "Who'd expect it at this hour of the night? Indeed only for this gentleman—the Lord sent him in the nick

of time to help me to drag the horse off the line. We owe our lives to him, Miss Molly."

"How shall we ever thank you?" asked Molly, in a soft, trembling voice. Her heart had given a sudden leap at the sight of the big dark figure. She thought she recognised the dog too.

"I was very glad to be of use. It was so lucky I was spending the evening with my friend, Dr. Dignam. We sat late. There are other ladies——"

"One of my sisters has fainted, I'm afraid."

"Ah, Dignam is still up. Better take her in there. He will attend to her. Won't you get back into the carriage? There will be no more steam trams to-night. Don't be frightened. I shall walk at the horse's head to the doctor's door. And afterwards till you have entered your own gates."

"If you would!" said Molly. Her nerves had had a shock. She had been about to say that she would walk the rest of the way, though it would have been a difficult matter to get her sisters home on their satin-shod feet. How was it that this chance-comer, with the deep musical voice that had the country accent in it, should restore her confidence? With him at the horse's head Molly would not fear steam trams.

A few minutes brought them to the doctor's house. Dr. Dignam was still up, smoking his last pipe, drinking his final brew of punch. He came immediately in answer to the assault on his door-knocker. The light poured out from the open hall door, as Molly stepped out of the carriage to make way for the unknown person who seemed to have taken them so completely in hand.

She stood in the hall beside Dr. Dignam, who was pouring forth his sympathy and condolences. She saw the other man come up the steps carrying her sister in his arms as though she were a child. He went into the doctor's sitting-room with his burden. Dr. Dignam

went out and gave a ceremonious arm to Nora, who was now alighting, looking rather pale and unsteady.

Molly followed the way the young man had gone, and saw him lay her sister down very gently on the red-damask-covered sofa, the colour of which made her pallor rather alarming by contrast.

"It is only a faint," he said, turning reassuringly to Molly. "Dignam will make her all right in a little while."

"Ah," said Molly, in a queer little thrilled voice—she was not yet recovered from the agitations of the night—"I knew it was you all the time, though I couldn't see your face, and you did not speak that day we met in Ballinamona. I was quite sure it was you, and I thought I remembered the dog."

A smile lit up the square dark face of Hugh Sinclair of the Glen—such a friendly smile, as he stood with his hand on his dog's head.

"I was so glad to be of use," he replied. "I was swinging along, carrying my lantern till the moon should rise—she will be up in ten minutes now—when the light flashed on your carriage and I saw what had happened—what was going to happen. It might have been a nasty accident. Thank God we pulled you off just in time."

"Just in time," said Molly, turning round as Dr. Dignam and Nora came into the room.

CHAPTER IX

HER MOTHER'S PEOPLE

While Aunt Pen cried over her rescued darlings, Aunt This took an unexpected view of the matter.

Both ladies had been sitting up waiting to comfort the travellers with hot chocolate and thin bread and

butter, served by a glowing little fire, which should be pleasant after the drive in the March air, that had a bite in it even in these valleys.

The accident had, of course, driven the dinner-party out of the girls' minds. The events preceding that awful moment when the steam tram was upon them had seemed to recede to some immeasurable distance. If Nora remembered that Lord Carbery was to call to-morrow, she said nothing about it. She, and Oonagh who sat in the chimney-corner lying back in an old brocaded chair and looking more lily-like than ever, had everything to say in praise of Hugh Sinclair. Molly heard them with a curious little swelling of the heart, but did not talk the most as she usually did, and left the praises to them.

Wilkins, conscientious man, had given honour where honour was due. Only for Mr. Sinclair's arrival, his enormous strength and his great promptness, nothing could have averted a fearful accident. In talking so glibly about something else, Wilkins perhaps intended to divert attention from the fact that he had started from Castle Lambert with candle-ends that guttered in their sockets before the journey was half done. He succeeded, if this was his intention, for people quite forgot to think about the unlighted carriage. Perhaps its pigmy lights after all might have been invisible in the glare of that horrible eye of light of the steam tram.

Aunt This's attitude was like a douche of cold water on the girls, who were rather enjoying the memory of their recent peril.

"It was a very disgraceful thing to happen," she said. "No doubt it will be all over the country to-morrow. Perhaps it will even get into the newspapers. I never thought that my girls' names would appear in the newspapers. Your dear father wouldn't have liked it."

She seemed to have forgotten that the late Lord Creggs went out of life in a perfect blaze of newspaper glory.

Her listeners gasped.

"But they couldn't help it, sister," began Pen.

"It wasn't our fault," cried Oonagh, Nora, and Molly all together.

Thisbe lifted her hand in a majestic manner for silence.

"In my time there was nothing ladies dreaded so much as notoriety," she said. "And if you please, my dears, we'll talk as little about this adventure as possible. It is a most annoying thing, most annoying. I really don't feel that I can forgive Mr. Balfour. I wonder if Dignam can be induced to hold his tongue? It is most likely that the people in the steam tram knew nothing of what was happening. I suppose Wilkins is still at his supper in the kitchen? I shall have him up to the morning-room, and impress upon him that he is not to make too much of this incident. Of course I do not blame you, my dears, but I must say that I am very sorry it should have happened—very sorry."

It was easy to persuade Wilkins to minimise the danger. Indeed the good man was quite willing that it should never be spoken about; but Miss Thisbe was too astute for that. If the thing was concealed and some one blabbed it, Mrs. Lambert would have cause for wonderment. No: Wilkins had better mention that they had met the steam tram, and been rather alarmed. That would be quite sufficient.

"As for the danger," said the little old lady severely, "I'm inclined to believe that there was never any danger at all."

Wilkins opened his stolid Yorkshire mouth to protest, but met the old lady's stern eye and closed it again.

"He won't talk," she said to herself as she returned

to the drawing-room. "He knows he was in fault. I should like to lay a horsewhip smartly across his shoulders."

She re-entered the drawing-room, where the clatter of tongues ceased with her appearance.

"From what has passed between me and Wilkins," she said, "you seem to have been exaggerating the accident very much. Of course I don't blame you. Girls are very nervous. But now, if you please, we'll forget all about it. Let us know how you enjoyed the party. There is something real about that."

But no one was inclined to talk about the party. Oonagh was unmistakably tired, and feeling the effects of her fright. Nora was silent, and absorbed in her own thoughts. Molly was conscious of a certain placid beatitude which found it enough to be alive, having been so close to death.

Thisbe packed them all off to bed, and, when they were safely out of hearing, turned to her sister.

"Pen, my woman," she said, "I always knew you were a fool."

Her sister's hurt flush disarmed her. She stooped down hastily, and with her soft, wrinkled, dry old lips kissed the placid forehead of the gentle Pen.

"You didn't take me," she said explanatorily.

"In what way, sister? Did you think that talking about the accident made Oonagh more nervous?"

"Nervous, fiddlesticks! She'll be all right after a night's sleep. It will never happen again, Pen. If they go to Castle Lambert they'll have to take the seven-mile drive round by Inch. Lord! Lord! to think of that monster of a thing bearing down on those precious children!"

Thisbe's fingers worked, and a little dew came out on her face, which she wiped away with a tiny film of muslin and lace, by courtesy a handkerchief.

"You feel it, sister?" said Pen, wonderingly. "I thought you didn't believe in their danger."

"You don't know me any better now than you ever knew me, Pen. Is it likely I shouldn't feel their danger? We never got anything good from England yet. Opening up the country indeed! Driving the gentry off the road, I call it. And killing them if they happen to be there by accident. I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Balfour!" concluded the old lady, bowing with bitter pretence of courtesy to an imaginary presence in the room.

"So happy, wasn't it? that the young man should have been there," said Pen, plucking up courage.

"The unluckiest thing that could have happened," said Thisbe, glaring at her.

"Surely, sister——"

"Why couldn't it have been any man in the country but Hugh Sinclair, the son of old Hughie of the Glen, Molly's own third cousin once removed? Why couldn't it, Penelope De La Poer?"

"I'm sure I don't know why it couldn't," responded Pen, faintly. "Do you know, I had quite forgotten the people's names. Sinclair, why surely the late Lady Creggs had relatives of the name? What a memory you have, sister!"

"The late Lady Creggs' mother was a Sinclair," said Miss Thisbe, grimly. "And old Hughie was as proud as . . . it seems ridiculous to say it, but as proud as we are. They were very grieved, I've heard, about the late Lady Creggs' uplifting out of the station of her family. This young man's mother,—it was to her—but there, you don't know everything, Penelope. I always kept my own counsel."

"It did seem hard to be parted from her own people like that," murmured the soft-hearted Penelope; "still, of course, it was the right thing."

"I'm glad you see it was the right thing," said

Thisbe, grimly. "I wouldn't be surprised now if you hadn't thought it the right thing."

"It was very becoming of Daniel O'Neill," said Pen, stoutly.

"It was very becoming of him, as you say."

"She showed great strength of mind," went on Pen. "I sometimes wondered at her, for I think she missed them. I often found her in tears. And I am sure Creggs would not have made her unhappy if he had known."

"As for making her unhappy, she wasn't unhappy. How could she be? Molly O'Neill, the daughter of Daniel O'Neill of the Hill Farm, Lady Creggs of Creggs Castle. She was happy, I tell you, Pen. But she was happy because she did her duty by her husband. Creggs would have let her come and go. Creggs never looked down on the connection. He was so unworldly, dear fellow. It was I who trained Molly to live up to the position he had given her—I who drummed her duties into her ears till the day she died. She often terrified me, for I used to see a look in her eyes as though she would run back to them. For the matter of that—never mind, it was only once. They showed a proper spirit."

"I have seen her wear a heart-broken look," murmured Pen, pityingly.

"She could have nothing left to wish for, except that she had given Creggs an heir. I was very proud of her. I trained her. Before she died she was fit to bear comparison with any Lady Creggs in the picture gallery."

"She was indeed beautiful," said her listener, with closed eyelids.

"I should have a harder task with Molly," muttered Thisbe, in a tone of grim intensity, "if she were to take the bit between her teeth."

Pen woke up suddenly out of her dreams.

"With Molly?" she echoed. "What trouble could you have with Molly? She has never been near any of her mother's relatives, she has hardly heard of them. Didn't we take care to have our servants even from the south of the country—servants who had never heard of Molly's people? She has been brought up by us, surrounded always by Creggs' ideas and associations: she is as proud as her sisters—as proud as we are, as you are, sister."

"She is the image of her father in character as she is the image of her mother in looks. Creggs was tolerant of his wife's people. Molly would be as tolerant of her mother's. I am uneasy about Molly. This going back to the land now. She laughs at her sisters' notions and at yours and mine. She does, in her heart of hearts, though she wouldn't hurt us by showing it. I have always been anxious about Molly. That this . . . cousin"—she said it with a wry face—"should have established a claim on her gratitude is most unfortunate."

"What is the young man like?" asked Pen, timidly.

"I hear nothing but good of him. He lives with his widowed mother in that white house on the side of Glen Phelim that you see as you cross the mountains to Portroe. He is hard-working and steady, and his mother put him to a good school, which hasn't spoilt him for a working life. He is neither a waster nor a spouter; he stays at home with his mother and reads books, or he plays games to develop his body. He is very well thought of and is a successful man, with new ideas about the farming that make the Glens people lift up their hands."

"How much you know about him, sister!"

"I made it my business to find out."

"It is a good thing the young man is not discreditable."

Her sister sent her a glance made up of affection and contempt.

"It is a very bad thing, Pen, my woman," she said. "If he was discreditable, Molly might perhaps not be in such danger; though I don't know, I don't know. Since her childhood I have always suspected that Molly would be drawn towards her mother's people. It may be all the worse if there is nothing about them to drive her back to us."

"You speak as though the dear child were——"

"She isn't yet, Pen, she isn't yet; and she won't be if I can help it. But no talk of this affair, mind—no talk at all of this Hughie Sinclair. I've only to hint to Oonagh and Nora that he is Molly's cousin, and they will never speak of him again. They would feel as I feel."

"Do you suppose Molly knows he is her cousin?"

"I don't know, I should say not. I always tried to keep it from her. But such things creep in by the key-holes. Creggs was another matter. He was the head of the family and could do what he liked, even marry Molly O'Neill of the Hill Farm, if he wanted to. But I mean to keep this Molly from her mother's people. What has the Honourable Mary De La Poer to do with mountain farmers?"

"What, indeed?" answered her faithful echo.

CHAPTER X

OUT OF THE PAST

A DAY or two later Molly stood in the open doorway of Mr. Beecham's office.

The old fellow welcomed her, as he was always ready to do, drawing the most comfortable chair he possessed

for her to sit down in, and pulling his big Spanish leather screen between her and the door.

"As though I needed all that," said Molly, radiantly, "a working woman like me and used to the wind and the weather!"

"They deal tenderly with you. They always do if you will only trust them," he said, looking admiringly at her glowing face. "And your aunt is still satisfied?"

"For fear of worse," laughed Molly. "She seems to have accepted it as a fact in my case that Satan finds work for the idle hands. She wonders I like messing about with dirty clay. I suppose she thought the violets would spring full-grown. She would rather see me at an embroidery frame like my sisters, helping to make new covers for the chairs. My shoes and gloves distress her."

"Ah! you can't make a flower grow without handling the earth. You are doing very well, Miss Molly, very well. That last lot now were very good and fetched a fair price. Dublin is looking up in the matter of flower buying. I don't suppose you'll make very much money this year. But next year you'll probably double your profits. You'll be extending the scope of your labours too. Did I tell you that Hugh Sinclair made thirty pounds out of his honey last season? He will make sixty next. Hugh is a go-ahead fellow. He is sowing mignonette seed for the bees. That will make the white honey. There are some people, my dear, who have the bad taste not to like the brown of the heather honey."

"That reminds me," said Molly. "Tell me something about Mr. Hugh Sinclair."

"Hugh Sinclair? Why, he's well known, not perhaps your side, but our side of the Lough. He is . . . why . . . he is a cousin of your own. I confess it has only come upon me in a flash. He must be a cousin of yours, of course. All that country-side is, more or less.

But the Sinclairs and the O'Neills were, of course, married into each other. Yes, he is a cousin of your own."

Molly turned red, and then a little pale with excitement during this speech.

"Ah," she said, "I guessed it from the beginning. I don't know how. So he is a kinsman? I have wanted to know my mother's people all my life."

The old fellow's simple, unworldly face lit up with pleasure.

"Hughie is a cousin for any lady to acknowledge. Of course, Creggs and the Glen Farm, although they are in neighbouring parishes, are really a long way apart, or were before Mr. Balfour's light railways opened up the country All that district at the back of the hills seems so remote. You have never been there, Miss Molly?"

"Never. I am going some day soon," answered Molly.

She had found out what she wanted to know, and took her leave very soon. She had timed herself for just such a short visit, knowing that the tram which carried the mail ran through Ballinamona at half-past four. She was home by daylight. The afternoons were longer now; and, having glanced into the shed where Johnny and Tommy and Larry and Micky were packing daffodils under the silent observation of Eily Laffan, she went on to the castle.

When she had changed her dress for a soft garment of heliotrope woollen stuff which had been sent over from Castle Lambert that morning, and entered the drawing-room, she found only her aunt Pen. The others were visiting at Athclea, an invitation which had included Molly, who, however, pleaded that she was a business woman and couldn't be expected to do afternoon visiting.

Pen was delighted to see Molly. She was the more sociable of the two sisters—Thisbe was in the habit of complaining that Penelope had no resources in herself—and was tired by this time of the company of Barry, the Irish terrier, who for his part was much affronted by being left at home to spend an afternoon by the fireside, which is a thing no Irish terrier will do if he can help it.

"You didn't go, Aunt Pen?"

"No, child. Jerry had as many, or rather more than he likes to carry. I thought you would get home about this time, and was hoping that you would not stay outside in the cold. I have been keeping the tea hot for you. How comfortable you look in that garment, Molly! We never wore such things in my day."

"No? It is a tea-gown. Mrs. Lambert's maid made it for me. It is so nice when one comes in a bit tired. Not that I am ever tired. I shall make you one, Aunt Pen."

"Oh, perhaps I shouldn't feel comfortable in it. It seems so loose. And Thisbe mightn't like it. She gives you great latitude, Molly."

"I am only sorry when I must do something she doesn't want me to do,—my unfortunate energy, my flower-farming, for example. Dear Aunt Thisbe, I'm afraid I'm rather a trial to her."

"A trial, Molly! Well, do you know, I really believe that you are Thisbe's darling in her heart of hearts. She has always been too just to make favourites; and of course she is devotedly attached to your dear sisters. Still, if there is one comes nearer to her than another, nearest of all, I think it is you, Molly."

"Perhaps because I have always had a will of my own," said Molly, laughing. "Aunt Thisbe and I are the two wilful ones. She loves me because I have

always been the most troublesome. It is the mother's way."

"She was disappointed that you would not stay at home to-day and go to Athclea with them. She thought you would be missed."

Molly thought it possible, but was not very deeply concerned. Her thoughts were not on young Mr. Jocelyn, who, with Lord Carbery, had been rather assiduous in calling this last couple of weeks. He was "a pleasant boy," no more: and if he had an incipient fancy for Molly, her frank unconsciousness of manner towards him was the most discouraging sign possible.

"It would have been pleasant," Molly said, "but of course I was busy. And I weigh more than you, Aunt Pen. Jerry would have had more cause for complaint. By the way, Aunt Pen, I have been finding out something. I wonder why I didn't know it long ago? The Mr. Hugh Sinclair who saved our lives from the steam tram—yes, he did save our lives, though Aunt This will not hear of it—is my own cousin, Aunt Pen. Actually my own cousin!"

Molly lingered over the words as though they were a delight to her. She might have been a very lonely person who had long sighed for some one of his name and blood, and had suddenly come into possession of a family and a loving welcome.

"My own cousin," she repeated, looking at the flame of the fire through her rosy finger-tips.

She did not notice the start with which her aunt, heard of her discovery, nor the pale dismay that overspread the delicate little old indeterminate face, so like and so unlike her sister's, as the speech had gone on.

"Oh but, Molly," she faltered at last, "you know those people are really nothing to you now. Your Aunt Thisbe would never hear of it. I implore you not to speak of this discovery to her. I really could not answer

for the consequences. You know her heart is not strong, and at her age any shock might be serious."

Molly's face lost its dreamy radiance.

"You don't really think that Aunt This would mind so much as all that? I have been meaning to ask her to write to my cousin and ask him to come here and be thanked for all he did for us. I thought I would speak to her as soon as ever she came home. You can't think he ought to go unthanked, Aunt Pen? That we ought to go on ignoring him just the same as ever now that he has done us such an immense service? Papa wouldn't have said that, Aunt Pen. I am quite, quite sure that papa would have been the first to have gone to him and thanked him."

"Perhaps you are right, child," said Pen, helplessly. "Your dear papa thought very little of mere worldly distinctions, proud as he was. His idea of who was and who was not his equal was not governed by the laws of this world at all. Why, I could tell you stories . . . how he would not meet people who had misconducted themselves, no matter what their rank was. His action made quite a sensation once or twice when the person he refused to meet was of very high station. We were proud of him, we were indeed, even if it was embarrassing at the time."

"He did not feel it a degradation to marry mamma?"

"Your dear mother! No indeed. You remember her, Molly, the sweetest of women, though you were only six when she died?"

"I remember," said Molly. "Even now at night I can remember her face when it leant above me in my little bed. Was it very sad, Aunt Pen? It comes to me in my memory, pale and sad. Yet she was happy. Any woman must have been happy with papa. Tell me, Aunt Pen. I used to watch mamma's face and wonder about it, though I was so little, when she used

to stand at her bedroom window and look across the Lough to the mountains. There used to be tears in her eyes. Did she never go back there to see her own people? I know they never came here, but did she go to them? Papa would not forbid her?"

Miss Pen lifted her hands as though to stem the impetuous torrent of Molly's words.

"Why should she go, child? She was Lady Creggs, and had the fondest husband in the world, and her little child. And your sisters loved her like her own children. And even Thisbe was in time devoted to her as I was. The servants too, and the people about the place forgot that she was not always Lady Creggs. She had really beautiful manners before she died. Perhaps she always had them. There was such a good groundwork, Thisbe always said. She was well-bred and gracious by nature, and Thisbe only had to teach her just to be proud and stately as befitted Lady Creggs. We never thought to have got over it, at least Thisbe didn't, but in the end she acknowledged that, except for the money, the marriage could not have been a greater success."

Pen's tongue was running away with her. If her sister could have heard her she would no doubt have called her a fool more heartily than ever. She did not notice that Molly's soft face had taken on a look of pale determination.

"I think between you, Aunt Pen, you broke my mother's heart," she said very deliberately, when a pause came in the old lady's rivulet of speech.

"Broke your mother's heart!"

Pen was more helpless than ever, as she sat there wringing her hands.

"What an extraordinary thing to say, Molly! Why, Creggs adored her, and she had the greatest consideration from every one! We did not entertain.

We were too poor for that. But people were very civil to her, and she was asked to the most exclusive houses in the county, and went too, till she discovered that Creggs hated going about. There was a little season of prosperity then,—land had gone up in value, before sinking to its lowest ebb,—and Creggs bought your dear mother a white stain gown, in which she looked the equal of them all. She wore the family diamonds, and Creggs even talked of having them reset for her, as the setting was a little old-fashioned. He never had money enough to do it afterwards, but he thought of doing it. How can you say, Molly, such a dreadful thing as that we broke her heart?"

"Who parted her from her own people?" asked Molly. Her young face had set itself sternly now. "If it wasn't papa, who was it?"

"It was . . . it was . . ." Pen floundered hopelessly: then made a dash for it. "Her own father was very proud. He was rejoiced that his girl should have made such a marriage, as well he might be. He was content to efface himself. I remember that dear Creggs suggested his being asked here more than once. He would not remember, dear fellow, that many of his wife's people were not only farmers, but shopkeepers as well. Daniel O'Neill had the good sense to see that it would never do. He did not come, and the connection dropped in time."

"Did mamma ask him?"

"I don't think she did, child."

"And if she didn't, whose fault was that? Oh, you needn't answer me, Aunt Pen. It was Aunt Thisbe's. I can imagine how she persuaded mamma. It was a mean thing to do, to give up one's own people because one had married out of one's rank. Mamma did not do it lightly. She died of it, Aunt Pen."

"Molly, Molly, what wild things you say! Your

dear mother died of consumption brought on by a neglected cold."

"She died of a broken heart. With all essentials to make her happy, she died because she had sinned against nature in abandoning her father and her own people. Poor mamma!"

It was no use arguing with Molly, and Pen gave it up in despair.

"You will not trouble Thisbe?" she said piteously at last. She was devoted to the stronger, elder sister, upon whom she had leant all her days. "You will not trouble Thisbe? You will remember that she has a weak heart, Molly? And that you are her favourite of all the children?"

"I will remember," said Molly. "I will not trouble Aunt This."

Yet she turned away her face when her aunt Pen would have kissed and praised her.

CHAPTER XI

GOING HOME

Gayer times had set in for the folk at Creggs. Lord Carbery came and went with Mr. Jocelyn in his train, and dragged the two elder girls and the aunts into a round of gaiety. They had not known that the country afforded such frivolity. They drove in Lord Carbery's mail-phaeton to see the last meet of the hounds for the year. The same vehicle carried them to the races at Rossnamullagh.

Of course people talked. When Lord Carbery did not don the scarlet and go hunting that day on which the fox gave them a chase never to be forgotten, be sure

various gentlemen whose days for catching his complaint were over, and various others whose time was not yet come, made jests in the smoking-room, and smiled meaningly at the sight of Carbery explaining things to the second of poor Creggs' daughters. This was when the meet was at Castle Lambert, the final meet of the season, and the best day's run said those who had hunted to those who had not.

Lord Carbery did not seem to regret the loss of his day's hunting. After the pack had gone away he had driven sedately up and down various roads in the neighbourhood as long as by any chance the hounds were in sight.

The party returned to lunch at Castle Lambert, and did justice to an excellent late luncheon, although, seeing what the hunt breakfast had been, they had protested with one voice against any suggestion of lunch.

It was a sight to see Lord Carbery, the hardest rider, the most enthusiastic hunting-man in the country, trotting his cargo of women-folk up and down the muddy roads. It excited Mrs. Lambert's admiration.

"I never thought it was in Carbery to be domestic," she said to her husband, who was laid up with an attack of gout that day, as she watched from the drawing-room window the excellent style in which Carbery brought his pair past that exceedingly ticklish corner just before the carriage drive swept round in front of the house.

"You showed less than your usual discrimination, my dear," answered her spouse, ruefully contemplating his swathed-up foot. "Carbery's tired of having so long a tether. He's ready to be tied up now and to make the most amiable of husbands. Upon my word, I congratulate you."

"That old creature, Thisbe, doesn't give me a word

of thanks, although they did meet here, and very much against her will if you remember. I tried to congratulate her the other day, and she pretended not to know what I meant. Did you ever hear such nonsense, John ? "

" Ah, Thisbe will go down to her grave with the last rag of convention wrapped about her. She wouldn't accept congratulations from any one till the thing is beyond Yea or Nay."

" She won't pretend then that any one is to be congratulated except Carbery. As though I don't know that those two dear girls are no longer as young as they were ! There wasn't a soul suitable for them on the Creggs horizon till I picked up Carbery. But here they are coming in. We'd better stop discussing them."

She went towards the threshold of the room to receive her guests, taking Oonagh and Nora to her matronly bosom, and pressing their soft pale cheeks against her own rosy ones.

" I am so glad to have you all for a quiet chat," she said. " This morning was a bustle, wasn't it ? It was too bad of Molly not to come. She's too devoted to business."

" Molly is inexplicable," said Thisbe, taking off her wraps, and letting them fall on the chair behind her. " She hasn't got tired of her fancy yet. I thought she would very soon have grown tired, or perhaps I didn't really think it, but only hoped it. Why don't you persuade her, Mrs. Lambert ? "

" I've given up trying to provide Molly with a mission in life," replied Mrs. Lambert, with a *double entente* which amused herself somewhat sadly. " She's one of the incurably active ones who won't be satisfied to fold their hands. What is she doing to-day ? "

" She has some business in Ballinamona," Thisbe

answered. "She goes her own way. I'm not reconciled to Molly behaving as though she were a gentleman; but she doesn't ask my leave, so I say nothing."

The subject of this conversation was at that moment in the little mountain churchyard of Ardnaree, about two miles from Ballinamona, high on the hillside above the Lough. Ardnaree is a village of one tiny street of clean little white-washed houses. So steep is the ascent of the mountain that one side of the street is a foot or two higher than the other, and when there are heavy rains the people at the lower side of the street are apt to get wet feet. The people are mostly weavers, silent, clean, austerely handsome people, as unlike the southern Celts as possible.

At one end of the village is the big bare church of the old faith, like a meeting-house, where the late Lady Creggs had prayed in her girlhood before she ever dreamt that at its altar she was to make a great marriage. An unbeautiful place to the eyes of the body; but consecrated for ever to one who has knelt there of a spring morning, when it is open to all the winds of heaven, and has seen the fervent people pressing close to the unrailed altar, heedless of the clay floor, soft with the recent rains.

Molly knelt a while, silent, with wet eyes for the sake of the mother who had been used to kneel there with her own people before the days of her happiness and her grief. Afterwards she walked through the village, where the diligent eyes barely lifted themselves from the loom, the bowed backs barely straightened themselves an instant, to see the strange lady going by. To this side of the Lough Molly was a stranger, though it was her mother's country. The short excursions which Thisbe had permitted the girls to make out of their conventional seclusion had not taken them in this direction. According to Thisbe, the land the other side

of the Lough was a hungry land, naked and forbidding. Molly did not find it so at her first sight of it. She was delighted with the cleanness and the dignity of the few straight-featured serious men and women she had met on her way. Even on the hillside the larks were rising this day of March. The Lough and its many islands glimmered below her in a rainbow haze. The air was different from the air of Creggs, purer, more exhilarating. Molly's nostrils expanded and she took long breaths of it. It was cold from the waters of the Lough, and it had the salt of the sea in it as well as the scent of the mountain. Over yonder, through a gap in the mountains, was the broken and sparkling quicksilver of the sea.

She had not finished her pilgrimage. At the other end of the village was St. Brendan's Church. It was an ancient pile, occupying the site of one more ancient, whereof a ruined gable clad in ivy alone survived. The church, which had once belonged to the religion of the people, had been some three centuries or more a Protestant church; but its graveyard still received the Catholic dead come home, after their quiet voyages in their glens and mountains, to rest near the bones of the Saint of much seafaring and many adventures.

The door of the church was coldly shut. Molly could not have prayed there if she would. She glanced at the ancient stone coffin which had been used as a horse-trough, till the late vicar, a zealous archæologist, had recognised and rescued it. She went on past the funeral urns and monoliths of stone within railings which marked the graves of the few Protestant families, till in a more populous part of the graveyard, with *Requiescat* and *Ora pro Me* on every tombstone, she found those she sought—Sinclairs and O'Neills. They made a great part of the population of the graveyard—many a Donal and David and Randal and Hugh O'Neill; many

Sinclairs, Hugh again, and John and Denis and Maurice and Patrick, and Bridget with Mary and Kathleen, the names recurring as they will with long-established families of unwandering people.

On a great cross of stone she read :

" Here lies all that is mortal of Mary O'Neill, wife of Daniel O'Neill, of the Hill Farm, Templebradan, who died March 14th, 1868.

" Also of her husband, Daniel O'Neill, who departed this life 28th of October, 1896. *Requiescat in pace.*"

The long grass grew around the grave, and twined itself through the rusty railings. Plainly there was no one who cared very much about the grave. With a sudden impulse Molly took the violets she was wearing, and laid them at the foot of the cross. She thought that she would come again, and try to borrow a spade and plant daffodils and narcissi there. Then she looked about her. The graves were very uncared for. Coarse long grasses grew upon many of them, sometimes almost hiding the stones. Those of recent date bore wreaths mostly withered. St. Brendan's gable, too, was almost hidden in the grey grass. The place had an air of wilderness, of solitude, more in keeping with the idea of a graveyard than the trim plots one sees elsewhere.

As she gazed she felt a thrill of loneliness and fear. The churchyard lay back from the road, and there were high walls about it. She felt alone with the dead, cut off from the living. She turned away from the grave and towards the gate by which she had entered. A big cloud had come up from the south and blotted out all the sunshine there had been a little while ago.

She was impatient with herself. She, Molly, who never had nerves, being afraid of this resting-place of saints ! As she made for the path her feet stumbled over graves hid in the long grass. She went quietly : she would not have hastened if she could, and she held

her head high. Though when a rabbit scurried before her feet she almost cried out in terror.

The cloud brought a premature afternoon. As she crossed the grass she was suddenly aware of an open grave at her feet. As she would have skirted it a startling sound broke on her ear. There was a funeral procession at the gates of the churchyard. The women were raising the keen.

She turned away, unwilling to meet the funeral, and went down a side path under the shadow of the ivied wall. The mournful sound of the keen followed her as she went. It was a young man's funeral, and the widow's cry could be heard above the conventional shriek of the professional mourners.

Suddenly she was aware that some one was by her side. It was hardly a surprise to her when she turned at the sound of footsteps and met Hugh Sinclair's grave kind eyes. But all at once her foolish shadowy fears seemed to have taken flight. She put her hand in his with the frankest expression of pleasure.

"I wandered in here," she said, "and the loneliness was getting on my nerves. I am very glad to see you."

He took her hand, and held it in a firm grasp.

"It is a mournful old place," he said. "What brought you here? You are a long way from home, you know."

"I was thinking before I came in here that the wild country was very like home. Even here I am among my kin."

Turning towards the grave of Daniel and Mary O'Neill, Molly pointed to it.

"I had an idea I should find that," she said.

"You ought to have known it," he answered, with something that suggested impatience. "Come; we need not meet the funeral party. There is another gate."

She went out side by side with him across the field upon which the other gate opened, and reached the road. The blackness of the overhanging cloud had begun to discharge itself in rain.

"You have no umbrella," he said, looking at her anxiously.

"I never carry such a thing," she replied.

"Ah, but you will be drenched, if I know anything about the weather in these regions. Up there where the road winds is the way I was going. My home and my old mother are over the crest of the hill in the next valley."

"My way is downhill," said Molly, looking at him half wistfully.

"Perhaps . . . you would take shelter? No one would blame you. You might go back to the village, but you would be drenched even then. You will be drenched before you get to the Glen, but my mother will see to you. Will you come?"

"I will come," said Molly, with a sudden joyous laugh. "I only waited to see if you would ask me."

"I shall not tell my mother who you are at first. I shall tell her in time. Now, can you run uphill?"

"I can try," said Molly, who was as swift as a deer.

He held his hand to her, and she took it. They ran on with their heads bowed before the storm. She needed the support of his grasp at times, for the road was slippery. Little runnels of water were beginning to make their way down it.

"This is a river-bed after rain," he said, looking at her.

Her eyes were bright under her little hard hat. The wet loops of her hair flapped about her small pink ears. The rain was on her satiny cheek and her long eyelashes.

"No one could say you ought not to take shelter," he said, as they topped the hill and entered the grey sheet of mist that covered the Glen.

"I should not listen to any one," she answered, lifting her white chin proudly. "You are good to give me hospitality."

He had let go her hand when the ascent was done, and trudged along now with both hands deep in his pockets. A mountain lamb sprang out of the mist and looked at them, then trotted beside them in a friendly manner.

"We are nearly home," he said encouragingly.

"Nearly home," repeated Molly; and her heart sprang up at the words.

"And here is Bruce," he said, as a great white shape bounded out of the mist. "Steady, old man! He is not used to being left at home. I could trust him to behave properly at a funeral, but the people would be scandalised."

"I believe he knows me," said Molly, with a flush of pleasure. The great dog had left his master's side and, coming to her sedately, had licked her hand.

"Blood is thicker than water," quoted Hugh Sinclair. "He knows you for one of the family."

CHAPTER XII

THE GLEN FARM

They had not gone far before the sun shone beyond the mist of rain, making it fall about them in showers of gold and diamonds. Presently the rain would be done and all the valley sparkling. They turned into a little *boreen* which made miry walking; then came upon a

white gate with a little wicket, which Hugh Sinclair held open for Molly to pass through.

By this time the rain had done its work so thoroughly that the wayfarers were drenched. Little lakes overflowed the brim of Molly's hat; her eyelashes dropped rain; her skirts flapped forlornly about her ankles; there was a squish-squish of water in her shoes.

Looking at her companion, she laughed out, and he heard her laughter with the pleased indulgence one accords to a child.

"Do you know," she asked, "that the rain is running down your nose?"

"It is running down yours, for the matter of that," he replied. "There is the sun coming out. The weather has done its worst upon us."

The wicket gave on a gravelled sweep before a low white house. The house was thatched, and the layers of many years had brought the eaves so low that the windows looked out from below it like bright old eyes under bushy eyebrows. The windows were deeply set in monthly rose-trees, jessamine, and woodbine. The little yellow stars of the jessamine were out, and even now the rose-trees bore a few pale blossoms.

They were under the shelter of the green latticed porch, with seats on either side. Molly looked back at the glorious view that was being revealed, as the mists rolled themselves off, returning to the heads of the mountains. Valley after valley was coming out below their feet, all shining and sparkling after their drenching, and the Lough was churned up into a wild agitation that made it more than ever like an inland sea. There was a thin haze of blue in the air now that the sun was out. The Glen was full of the sharp smell of the peat.

"How beautiful!" she began.

"You can admire it when you get on dry clothes,"

he interrupted, pushing open the door, and compelling her to follow with a gentle hand laid upon her arm. The great dog shook himself on the gravel path and stalked off to some back regions.

"It is a shame to come in here," said Molly, looking down at the cleanliness of the black and white tiles on which their garments were dripping. "I ought to go with Bruce."

The little hall was full of green light. All the light there was in that house filtered through green leaves and came out tinged like the sea. She glanced round her curiously while her cousin stamped his feet on the mat. Close by her a tiny straight corridor was ascended by a couple of steps. On the walls were a few good old engravings, and some birds and fishes in glass-fronted cases. Against the wall was an old Sheraton sideboard, with guns and hunting-crops above it. In the embrasure of the window at the other end of the hall stood an old carved chest.

Her eye took in these things in a second of time. She saw the flowery trellis of the wallpaper with a feeling that she had seen it before. The smell of the house, the all-pervading peat, something of dampness striking through the scent of lavender in bags, seemed to her as if she had known it in a dream.

She found herself following her cousin across the threshold of a room, making dumb protests as she did so at the state of her garments, and daring to follow him no further than the rim of snowy boards that surrounded a carpet which took up the middle of the floor.

"Ah, Hughie! Are you very wet, my boy?" she heard a soft, crooning voice ask as she crossed the threshold.

"Pretty wet, mother. I shall change, though I must go out again presently. I have brought you a

young lady whom the rain had caught without an umbrella. She is very wet, I am afraid."

"The lady is kindly welcome," said the soft voice.

Hugh Sinclair's mother was little, very little for the mother of so big a son. She wore lavender ribbons in her cap, and her eyes were the colour of her ribbons. Her face was full of peace, and her voice was like the voice of a dove. She wore a black silk apron over her grey gown, and her little wrinkled hands were knitting a mass of grey yarn.

"Dear, dear, I'm afraid you are very wet," she said, pressing Molly's hands. "You are not used to Glen weather. Come with me, my dear, till I find a change for you. Indeed, indeed all these things must be dried before you venture out again."

She drew Molly with her, in a gentle hurry and bustle up the steps of the little corridor and along its white uncarpeted boards, till, opening a door at the further end, she brought her into a bedroom as old-fashioned as the rest of the house.

"Now I must see," she said, opening a cupboard door, "what I can find for you to put on. Sure, I've but queer old-fashioned things for such a pretty young lady. Still, they'll serve while your own things are getting dry."

She brought out an armful of garments, and laid them on the old mahogany four-poster bed.

"They are all well aired," she said; "I keep nothing damp. Now, my dear, let me help you. Dear, dear, your poor shoes, and your stockings!"

She stooped to help Molly to take off her shoes, but this Molly would not permit. She removed them herself, and drew on the soft knitted stockings and found their warmth grateful, but she looked with a little laugh of dismay at the row of Lilliputian shoes her hostess had set out for her to choose from.

"They will never go on me," she said, looking at her shapely feet that were used to much tramping. "We have bigger feet in these days."

"Indeed I have very small feet; I could never oblige a friend coming in like yourself with a loan of slippers. My husband used to say that he wondered how I got about so much on them. If you wouldn't mind, my dear, I've a knitted pair of bedroom slippers here. No one has ever worn them. In fact, I intended them for a present."

Molly protested that it was a pity to spoil their newness, but they were the only ones that would fit, so they went on. Molly had got off her dress by this time and was squeezing her hair dry in a warm towel before the little dark glass in the window. Mrs. Sinclair left her for a minute, and when she came back stood an instant without speaking, watching Molly as she twisted up her dark braids with her pretty bare arms raised at her task.

"You are a stranger in the Glen?" she said, after watching her a second or two.

"I have never been here before," answered Molly, turning away from the lilac eyes, which were looking at Molly with more than curiosity in their gaze.

She had the strongest impulse to fling herself on the kind breast, and tell her who she was, and how glad she was to be back among her mother's people: but she conquered it. Let Hugh tell in his own time.

"And so Hughie found you in the rain?"

"And brought me in to be dried, like a Good Samaritan."

"Hughie's ever doing kind things," said his mother fondly. "Why, one day in the snow, when it was all in drifts, he found a lamb half buried in it, or Bruce did for him, and what did he do, when he had got the

creature out, but carry it home to me in his arms? It was a steep climb up, for 'twas not far from Ardnaree he found it, and the wet and cold of it saturated my boy through. But he took no harm from it."

"And the lamb?"

"The lamb lives, and follows him almost as fondly as Bruce does. It's out on the hills again, but it will even come home with him to his own door."

"That must have been the little lamb that followed us through the rain. Your son didn't tell me."

"Hughie wouldn't. He keeps his kind deeds to himself. Not that he'd count that one. He would think it the only thing to do. But it was a steep climb, and he was soaked through."

"He followed a great Exemplar," murmured Molly, more to herself than to the wistful face.

She was turning over the garments now, looking for something to cover her well-proportioned young body. One thing after another was rejected. At last she found a loose-fitting jacket of flowered delaine, with little knots of violet leaves on a white ground. There was a quilted black petticoat to accompany it. These she put on, smiling at the owner's laments that the more modern and prized garments would not fit her guest.

"Such a queer old-fashioned thing," she said.

"I think it is delightful," said Molly, looking at herself in the glass, where she presented indeed a charming picture. The jacket was drawn in by an invisible string at the waist. The neck fell loosely away from Molly's round white throat. The sleeves were a little short, and showed the arms just where the tan had not reached them.

"I look as though I was going to a fancy ball," she said. "It is a much prettier dress than any I have ever worn."

"Such a queer old-fashioned thing," said the owner again regretfully. "Little I ever looked to hear it praised. Not but what it becomes you, my dear. And the petticoat and all. Nothing could go better with your hair and your skin."

Again her eyes grew wistful as she watched Molly.

"I feel as though I'd seen you before," she said, "and yet you tell me you've never been in the Glen. 'Twill be in Ballinamona, perhaps?"

"Perhaps in Ballinamona; I am sometimes there. I too feel as though I'd been here before. The way that little round glass up there reflects the green at the window—I feel as if I had seen it some time. And that picture on the wall—St. Patrick, is it?—done in Berlin wool. I feel as if I'd known it all, some time, in some other life, perhaps."

"You do, dearie? 'Tis strange you should feel so. But the old picture, now. 'Tis the finest tent-stitch, all except the eyes, and those are beads of course. It was my dear mother's own work. She learnt it of the French nuns. They were the very first to come into this part of the country after the religion was allowed, and they lived very quietly inside high walls. They were very beautiful workers. And so you like the old picture, dear?"

"It is very curious. The eyes are a little alarming."

"You aren't the first to say so. There was a young cousin of my own that used to be here—sure it's years ago—more betoken you have a look of her: that's why I keep fancying I've seen you before. She wouldn't sleep in the room unless St. Patrick had his face to the wall. She didn't like the beady eyes of him any more than yourself. But sure I'm keeping you too long. I don't know what Hughie will be saying to me at all, and

you so drenched. Come right away to a warm room and have some food, dearie! 'Tis taking cold you will be with all my old chatter."

She led the way to a quaint, bare dining-room in keeping with the rest of the house. This was brighter, having a window at one side which overlooked the Glen. A meal was spread on the snowy cloth of the long table, such a meal as Molly loved, which she was never allowed to have at Creggs.

There was tea at one end of the table, flanked by smoking piles of griddle-cakes, honey, and delicious-looking butter. At the other was a ham, some lettuce in an old bowl, and brown-shelled eggs in a stand.

Hugh Sinclair was already in the room; and, as he turned when the others entered, something in his eyes told Molly of the success of her masquerade. He was standing on the hearthrug, looking huge in his grey suit, his dark handsome head reflected in the little oblong glass over the mantelpiece.

"Well?" asked Molly, lifting her eyebrows a little, and then feeling vaguely perturbed yet delighted by the something, finer than admiration, that sprang up in his eyes.

"Well," he responded, "you look as though the things were made for you."

"I feel quite at home in them," she laughed, taking the chair near the fire to which he motioned her. "We were hard put to it to find anything to fit me. Now I shall not want to give these up."

"Sure I hope you won't be in too great a hurry," said Mrs. Sinclair, hospitably, as she began to make the tea.

CHAPTER XIII

HER MOTHER'S DAUGHTER

The meal passed without the revelation which Molly half longed for and half feared. It was a delightful meal, its sweetness enhanced to the girl's inner sense by the evident pleasure mother and son found in her presence. Molly had never been so assiduously waited on before, and despite the tumult of sad and happy thoughts with which her mind was filled, she was hungry, and enjoyed the excellent meal served with a delicate cleanliness and daintiness that delighted her.

If Thisbe had known! There was nothing in the behaviour of mother and son to disturb Molly. A little more homeliness of speech, a broader accent than she was accustomed to; otherwise they behaved like gentlefolk. Their table appurtenances need not have been disdained at Creggs; the real old willow-pattern plates, with the faintest line of gold at the edge, the tea-cups and tea-pot with their deep green borders and arabesques of gold. Molly knew that they had such things in the farmhouses often, and that their owners would no more part with them than they would with their own souls. She had not seen them before in everyday use.

She admired the china and the old thin silver, and her hostess looked pleased.

"I never let a hand touch the things but my own," she said. "You will see me collect them as soon as we have finished and put them away in the little pantry there, which Hugh built out for me, till I have leisure to wash them. If I gave them to a servant to handle, even to Maggie who is a good girl, 'tisn't the whole set I'd have left to hand down to Hugh's wife."

Molly glanced at her cousin. A little colour had come into his bronzed face. She wondered if there was anybody likely to become Hugh's wife. She hoped not, and then rebuked herself for the selfishness of the thought. Yet this mother and son were just ideal. She could hardly expect the ideal state of things to extend indefinitely. Not that it mattered. She had come back to her mother's people and was not going to be finicking about them, even the remote cousins who were publicans in the town of Erris, as her aunt Pen had told her, with scorching blushes, after that interview in which Molly had seemed to judge Thisbe's conduct to her mother and found it wanting. She was going to go through with it, if her mother's people would have her. She didn't suppose she would have very much in common with publicans in the town of Erris. Still, they were her mother's people—her own people. And the good blood would show even there, as it showed every day in the adaptability of the people.

She remembered how she had visited the convent at Ballinamona with her aunts, and had been conducted around in semi-state. Your nuns are the most conservative of people, and doctrines of social equality find no place among them. Her aunt Thisbe had been much struck by the appearance of two tall sisters who had played a duet for harp and piano : one white and golden as a lily, the other richly coloured as her Eastern namesake ; she was called Esther. To Thisbe's question about the girls, the nuns had answered deprecatingly that they were the daughters of a Dublin publican, and the Honourable Thisbe had fallen dumb. But Molly remembered to this day the exquisite straight eyebrows of the dark beauty, the imperial carriage of both girls ; and the memory comforted her about those unknown public-house-keeping cousins.

What followed reassured her as to the possible Mrs.

Hugh, who might not prove good enough for her husband and mother-in-law.

"My mother is always talking about 'Hugh's wife,'" Hugh said, with a grave smile at Molly. "It is to conceal her dislike of such a possible person. I am in the position of most only sons. My mother thinks her goose a swan."

"Indeed, Hugh, you're giving the young lady a very bad impression of me," said Mrs. Sinclair, simply. "'Tis only that I wouldn't like to see you throwing yourself away. If I could find a girl who would be a good wife and make you happy."

"We haven't yet found her, have we, little mother?"

Hugh turned away the conversation to something less personal to himself, and more interesting to the guest, presumably, and the talk did not seem to flag. It was as though the three had known each other always.

The meal was not at an end when Hugh was called away on a matter of business.

"I must be away an hour or so," he said, with a down-bent courteous head as he stood by Molly's chair. "You will forgive my leaving you? My mother will be very glad of your company."

"Don't apologise," answered Molly, brightly. "Am not I a working woman?"

Mrs. Sinclair looked at her with a discreet curiosity. Molly wasn't her idea of a working woman. To tell the truth she was very anxious to know all about Molly, and how her son had discovered this fine young lady wandering in the Glen. That likeness, too, grew more disturbing, though she did not as yet suspect it to be more than a chance likeness.

"She can't go yet," said Mrs. Sinclair, "even if the hurry was ever so great. Her things won't be dry these two hours."

"And I couldn't borrow these?" said Molly, making a little grimace to herself as she thought of the consternation at Creggs if she should arrive in the borrowed garments and tell where they had come from.

"The days are long now," answered the old lady placidly; "and when my son is free he will drive you on your way home. Now come to the fire and be happy till he comes back."

"Might I," asked Molly, coaxingly, "wash the china for you? I am used to handling precious china. You shall see how careful I am."

"My dear——"

"I shall feel less guilty about keeping you idle all the afternoon if you will let me do it. See me wash one or two things. Then you can dismiss me if I don't do it cleverly."

Mrs. Sinclair looked at Molly's hands.

"I can trust you," she said. "You will handle it all right. I think the reason why servants break so much is because they have such coarse fingers. An egg's-shell or a hammer is all the same to them."

Molly enjoyed herself immensely, washing the china, with her sleeves rolled above her elbows, and an apron, which Mrs. Sinclair had provided for her, fastened about her waist. When it was all done and put away, she sat down opposite her hostess in a chair made of twisted straw ropes, which was delightfully comfortable. She said as much, and the old lady smiled.

"My boy made those chairs," she said. "Hugh is very clever with his fingers. He has a mechanical turn that saves him a lot. He can generally do his own repairs, and that is very important on a mountain farm like this. We need to be self-dependent."

"I suppose so," said Molly, looking at the old-fashioned ornaments on the chimney-piece dreamily. There was a little grey house, whose occupants, an old

man and woman, went in and out with an umbrella or without as the weather was wet or dry. There was a glass globe full of water, in which was a castle. Molly knew that globe: you had only to shake it in order to create a snowstorm. There was a shepherd and a shepherdess with crooks and dogs. There were a pair of mother-o'-pearl shells.

"I am sure," she said, "that in some other life I was here and played with those things, and put the shells to my ears and heard the sea, and shook up the snowstorm in the glass. And . . . yes, there is a cuckoo clock. I knew there was one in the house of my dreams."

Mrs. Sinclair looked at her in a startled way.

"I don't know about other lives," she said. "I mean lives before this one. I am sure of the life after it. But, my dearie, was it in another life? Was it . . . by any chance . . . in this life?"

"How can I tell?" asked Molly, turning red and pale. "If I ever was here I must have been so little that I can't remember. Perhaps it is only fancy that I remember those things. So many houses have them."

"My son didn't tell me your name—if he knew it."

Molly suddenly flung herself from her chair to the ground, and laid her cheek against Mrs. Sinclair's lap.

"Forgive me," she said, "for having come like this. Perhaps you will be sorry you welcomed me when you know who I am. I am Molly De La Poer, your own cousin. Oh, please forgive me! I wanted to come, yet it is true that I met my cousin Hugh by accident and the rain surprised us and drenched us, and he would bring me home."

She looked up then and was surprised at the feeling in the soft, lined face. It was as though a peaceful pool had suddenly been troubled. All kinds of emotions, sweet and bitter, worked in its expression, and the lilac of the quiet eyes was dimmed as by a film.

"My son did right," she said slowly. "Do you think I am not glad to have you, Molly? Why, I loved your mother beyond telling. It has always been a great trouble to me that we were parted. Kiss me, love! My Molly's child—my dear love!"

She hugged Molly against her breast, and the girl felt a curious sense of mother-comfort. Was it something she had been missing all those years, despite the affection which surrounded her? The broad homely country accent fell on her ears like the tenderest music: the fond epithets rained upon her were sweet to her ears as honey.

Presently they were quiet, and Molly sat on the hearthrug, staring into the fire, listening to the flood of soft and tender reminiscences Mrs. Sinclair was pouring out, while her hands kept smoothing Molly's dark braids.

"Is it possible I was here as a child?" Molly asked at length. "I remember the boarded floor so white and shining. And this rug; it was newer then. I was near earth then, and I would notice the floor. The smell of the house too—I recognised it as soon as I entered, the smell of the peat mingled with lavender and something of dampness. We remember more vividly by smell than by any of the other senses."

"Ay, indeed, the peat. Sure we couldn't get rid of it. Isn't the Glen outside full of it? And the lavender bags I keep to try to banish it out of my clothes. And it rains a deal, and the black stones in the walls will weep. Strange that you should remember it! You were no more than three."

"So I was here?"

"You were here. I couldn't give up your mother as her father did, though I think it broke his heart, nor believe she'd willingly give us up. Many a time I took the little pony and drove down t'other side of the Lough

and by the wall of Creggs, thinking I'd maybe see her. And sure one day I did. She was holding yourself by the hand, and there wasn't a soul near us. And she undid the gate and came through to me. She told me then how she was sick for a sight of the Glen and the smell of the peat. Ye haven't the bog over Creggs way. And learning that his lordship was away for the day, and the two old ladies gone visiting, I just whipped her up into the little cart, and wrapped my blue cloak about her so that she looked like a country woman with the hood of it over her head, and you so snug inside it. And I drove the pony home here as fast as he could travel. Ay, indeed, it surprised him, for he was used to taking his time. She was two hours here before she need go back, and then I took her back and left her where I found her. It was the first and the last time. My man, Hugh's father, said I shouldn't have done it. He was terrible straight. I never did it again. His word was law to me."

"And I——"

"You were as fine a child as ever I saw. And restless. My Hugh was eight then, and I could trust him to mind you. You were all over the place. Ay, indeed, he humoured you. You roared when you had to go. I thought we'd never get you quiet."

"I've wanted to come back ever since. I know it now. I used to dream of this room."

"I wanted her to tell her husband the hunger that was on her, but I couldn't persuade her. The old lady, his aunt, had taught her that it was her duty to him to give up her own people. She was scared-like about it. I felt I was scaring her of me trying to persuade her, so I gave up. Sure it was her father's fault as much as any one's, the poor man. He should never have given her up."

"He never should."

"But now, tell me, asthore. How did you get up here all by yourself? and were you let to come?"

"I wasn't let to come," said Molly, repeating the homely phrase; "I have taken to flower-farming like your son, and am a free woman to come and go, much freer than my aunt Thisbe likes. They are away to-day, all of them. I am supposed to be in Ballinamona on business. Ah, how much happier I am!"

A curious expression came into the faded face, before which Molly unconsciously quailed as before an adverse verdict.

"Ay, surely it has been happy. It was near as good as having your mother back again. You'll be telling your aunts about it when you go home?"

"How am I to tell Aunt Thisbe? She is old, past eventy, and she has a weak heart."

"She would be angry that you came?"

"She has been full of prejudices all her life. She has no right to make me unhappy. Poor Aunt Thisbe, she is devoted to me as she was to mamma. But her ideas are all wrong. No one can say we ought to be bound by them."

"What did you mean to do, then, Molly? To come again?"

"If you would let me, yes."

"Without the old ladies knowing, behind backs like?"

"I am old enough to act for myself: I am twenty."

"I wouldn't let you come like that, Molly. I loved your mother better than any one except Hugh and Hugh's father, but I never sought her out again. My man's word was law to me. You must come openly, child, or not at all."

Molly's eyes filled with tears.

"You don't mean that I have found you out only to

lose you ? Let me come ! If papa were alive, he would let me."

" Indeed I am sure he would. He was above the ways of the world : so I've heard. But I think my son would say the same as I say. He is coming in now. There he is, passing the window."

Molly looked up and saw the big figure in its short jacket and gaiters and high boots, the soft cap pushed back on the brown hair, and said to herself mentally that, in spite of the mire and the rough clothes, Hugh looked as fine a gentleman as any of them. The big dog was at his heels as usual, and again Molly thought there was a likeness between them : they had the same grave majestic air. He passed on, but left Molly with an intuition that he would support his mother. They were as proud as the De La Poers themselves, as Thisbe had somehow discovered, marvelling at the strangeness of it, and they had as fine a sense of honour.

" He is five years older than you," said the mother, as he passed out of sight. " I was more than forty when he was born, and I never hoped for a child."

The hall door opened and shut, and the feet went down the little hall, passing the door of the room in which they sat.

" Hugh is getting rid of his working clothes," said his mother, a wave of love crossing her face " He will be with us as soon as he has changed. Let me say before he comes that I love you like my own child, my dear love. But you must only come back to us openly. I said as much to your mother after she had come, and my man said I was wrong to have brought her. Some day I will tell you how I loved your mother so dearly, and what good friends we were."

" Some day . . . when I come again ? "

A smile sparkled in Molly's eyes, though they were still wet.

"When you come again. Ah, here is my boy!"

An expression of great pleasure came into Hugh Sinclair's face as he saw the attitude in which the two were seated.

"I do not need to tell you, mother," he began.

"You do not, Hughie. I suspected it from the first. And now she wants to come again: but her aunt must not be told. She has a weak heart——"

"She is old and prejudiced," broke in Molly. "She would never listen to argument. I am her favourite."

"Then you must spare her. Much as my mother and I would value your visits, we must——"

"I thought she was so gentle," said Molly, with a sigh of despair. "Now I know where you get that stern look from. Oh yes, it is stern; and she can look just the same. How she has deceived me! So I have only found my own people to lose them again!"

"You shall not lose us. My mother and I are steadfast people. Till you can come openly. To-day was different: no one could have denied you shelter in such a storm. I ought to have taken you back to Ardnaree perhaps."

"Don't grudge me this one visit," said Molly, in a hurt voice. "I suppose you will not refuse to speak to me when we meet?"

"Why should I? It is different from your coming here—secretly. I shall be greatly honoured by your willingness to recognise me. We shall meet, I dare say. Are we not both gardeners?"

During the drive to Ballinamona his talk was on the safe subjects of bulbs and roots, of the newest hyacinths and the latest hybrid of the gardeners.

CHAPTER XIV

GOSSIPS

Molly went home with a swelling heart. She had been so ready to take these people of her mother's into it; and after all it was they who had rejected her. She was conscious of a great pity for her mother, who had not had strength to withstand the fanatical pride of her own and her husband's family. It amused her in a grim way to think of Aunt Thisbe's bewildered incredulity if she could know that the Sinclairs of the Glen had closed the door of the Glen Farm on Molly, the Honourable Mary De La Poer.

"I should like to try it on her," Molly said to herself, with uncheerful humour. "If she had not the weak heart now! I wonder whether her admiration for their sense of honour would make her forgive them their presumption in rejecting me?"

A day or two later she saw Hugh Sinclair in the street at Ballinamona. He was on the other side of the street from Mr. Beecham's house, which Molly was approaching from the opposite direction. He was about to cross over, but, catching sight of her, apparently changed his mind, and, having lifted his hat, went on down the street.

"It isn't playing the game," said Molly, indignantly, to herself.

She had thought of telling the story of her visit to the Glen to her aunt Pen, and of approaching her aunt Thisbe in that way. She did not think that Pen could long keep anything from her sister, especially if it were something Thisbe wanted to know. But Aunt Thisbe would never consent to her being friends with the

Sinclairs, not while the life remained in her, so it was no use troubling. The first visit to the Glen must be the last. Yet sometimes when the trailing masses of cloud blew like smoke off the mountains and revealed to her at her work the little white road that wound its way into the Glen, she smelt the peat again, and had the exile's sickness. Sometimes, when it was going to be wet and the hills came near in the humid atmosphere, she could see the flank of the mountain, green now with the sprouting of the mignonette which Hugh Sinclair had sown for his bees. There was a broad pale green patch of it under the yellow of the gorse, and the rust of bracken, and the brown of last year's heather.

Time had been when she had hoped that he would come and go cousinly fashion, commend her work, and advise her on it, since he was older than she at the flower-farming. She had imagined their discussing the things in which both of them were interested. But he did not come; he never would come. She said to herself angrily that she would forget her mother's people. The Sinclairs were to have been the door through which she would go to meet all sorts of kinsmen and kinswomen, congenial and uncongenial. But since the door was locked against her, all that unknown country must remain unexplored. She need think no longer upon what possible ties there might be between the Honourable Mary De La Poer and the O'Neills who were publicans in Erris.

May came very hot that year, the predecessor of a miraculous summer which was to last till September. It was the most fortunate thing in the world that Molly had planted the southern slope below the wood with strawberries.

"Five years out of six," said Mr. Beecham, "the strawberry crop will fail in Ireland. Our berries won't drop off from drought as they do in England, but they

will be cold and watery for want of a hot sun. This is the sixth year. Miss Molly, I felicitate you!"

Molly was proud of her Scarlet Wonders and her Royal Sovereigns. She was delighted with the newly planted orchard at the foot of the southern slope, the little trees of which bore this year a few pale blossoms. Next year there would be fruit.

She was delighted, too, with her herb-garden. Mint and sage, angelica and borage, vervain and dill, rue, rosemary and thyme, grew within a hedge of southernwood and lavender. She had so many plans now that she had to keep her head level so as to get things done in order. She was going to make the Irish a vegetable-eating as well as a flower-loving people, she boasted. Presently, when her vegetables grew, she was going to teach Peggy Mahon, who had been cook at Creggs since Mrs. Sweeney abdicated, how to cook something else besides cabbages and potatoes. Her work was making her utilitarian; and she said, to the horror of Aunt Penelope and her sisters, that she would rather see the Irish cooks and gardeners than poets and artists. "Let them put their artistry into everyday things," she said.

Occasionally she had visitors in her working-hours. To-day Mr. Beecham, who had had business in the neighbourhood, called with a copy of a gardening paper for her, and, having accidentally encountered Thisbe, had been very kindly received by her. All the gentry held Mr. Beecham in much consideration, and he was a great gossip of the innocent kind. Thisbe loved a gossip and could forget, when it suited her, that Mr. Beecham's grandfather had been the gardener at Creggs.

He had sipped a glass of the port with which the cellars of Creggs had been well stocked in the old smuggling days, and had unpacked his little budget of news. In the absence of many gentry Thisbe was not

averse from hearing of the affairs of her humbler neighbours. Presently there was a pause, and Mr. Beecham thought he would go out and see what Miss Molly was doing just now.

Thisbe shook a reproachful finger at him.

"I don't know that I have quite forgiven you for helping that headstrong child to have her own way," she said. "I never thought to see any of my girls take to new-fangled independent ways. And to make money—actually to make money!"

She spoke as if the money-making were the capital offence, and Mr. Beecham chuckled.

"You wouldn't mind, ma'am, if Miss Molly had done something useless in the garden out there now?"

"I shouldn't have minded. I myself have often taken a basket and a pair of scissors and snipped off the withered leaves and flowers as I went. I should not have objected to my niece doing in my garden what other ladies do."

"Her flowers make the room mighty pleasant," said Mr. Beecham, sniffing about him as he spoke. "And she'll do other things. She has really a practical vein in her. I shouldn't have encouraged her, ma'am, if I hadn't suspected it. She takes to the farming as to the manner born."

He was engaged in putting away his silk handkerchief into the crown of his hat, and did not notice Thisbe's change of expression.

"Her dear father was never practical," she said a trifle haughtily. "It was the last thing any one could have accused him of."

"Any more than his neighbours," assented Mr. Beecham, simply. "Ah, well, people like Lord Creggs don't need to be practical. But if we could only make the humbler people so."

"I pray you will not," responded Thisbe, with a

wave of her hand. "I can imagine nothing more unpleasant and undesirable than that you should teach our simple peasantry the utilitarian ways of England."

"Would France do?" asked Mr. Beecham, anxiously. "They're a sort of cousins of ours, and they're very thrifty."

"France would certainly be better," said Thisbe, more graciously.

"We'll never work too hard while the climate is what it is. It puts our energies asleep. When we get to more step-motherly climates we turn in and do all the hard work. As Hughie Sinclair says——"

"Who?" interrupted Thisbe, in an agitated voice.

"Hughie Sinclair of the Glen. He takes up my ideas. I'm very proud of him—prouder than of anybody except Miss Molly. He's a sort of connection of hers, by the way. I was delighted to have the chance of introducing them. I beg your pardon, ma'am, I'm afraid you're not well."

Thisbe had turned a sickly dark colour. "My drops," she said, pointing to a little phial and glass. "And . . . ring the bell."

Mr. Beecham waited in alarm till he saw the natural colour come back to the lady's face. He left her in the hands of her sister and a maid, and went out, not associating her attack at all with anything he had said.

He found Molly among her strawberries and told her of her aunt's seizure, assuring her that she was quite recovered before he had left the house. They had grown accustomed of late to these attacks of faintness. However, Molly walked back to the house with him, listening to his cheerful chirping, which was like the chatter of the birds in the hedgerows.

"No one is doing so well as you this year," he said. "You are lucky in every way, Miss Molly."

"Not Mr. Sinclair?" she could not help asking.

She had said to herself often that her interest in the young man was but natural, seeing that he was the only one of her kinsmen she knew.

"Not even Hughie, though Hughie's lucky too. I hope he's going to have the greatest of luck. What better luck can befall a man than to have a good wife? Alison Graham is the lady: her farm adjoins your cousin's: a charming girl, I assure you, Miss Molly, and plenty of sense. Her land is fatter land than Hugh's. She believes in the dairying too. She has spent six months at the best creamery in Ireland, learning all that is to be learned. We have been very old-fashioned hitherto. I met Hughie walking with Alison the other day. They made a handsome couple."

"I am very glad," said Molly, turning the conversation swiftly to other things. She was not interested in Alison Graham. A blooming country girl, doubtless! The thought of her presence in the house in the Glen made Molly feel as if the place would not be the same. With Alison Graham in it, its scents and its purity and old-fashioned homeliness would beckon Molly no more.

The invalid detected that Molly had come in to make inquiries, and was not grateful. Thisbe resented her heart weakness as she did her age, and was very curt with any one who made a fuss about her. She sat bolt upright now in her stiff chair by the window, and expressed surprise at Molly's presence at this hour.

"I suppose you had to come in," she said, "to shake off that old gossip, Beecham. I was very tired of him before he took himself off. Quoting poetry too, and poetry which I know nothing of. Why can't he quote Pope or Addison? They are the poets for gentlefolk. He raved something at me between his snuff-taking which he told me was by an American called Whichman, or Whiskman, or Whiteman, or something of the sort.

It didn't seem to me to be fit for a lady's ears at all. But what can you expect from old Peter Beecham's grandson?"

Molly took this outburst as the fretfulness of the most unwilling invalid. She had often heard her aunt scold at Mr. Beecham before; yet she had a way of intercepting him when his visit was to Molly, which showed she liked him.

She went back to her work, resolving to be very busy. But Fate was against her designs that afternoon, for while she was climbing the ten-acre-field, another visitor was in the drawing-room with her aunt. This was Mr. Jocelyn, who still lingered on at Athclea, and had been looking rather rueful of late.

When he was shown into the drawing-room and found only Thisbe, it increased his melancholy. Thisbe had a sharp way with her, and Mr. Jocelyn's English nationality did not impress her favourably. She wanted to know who Mr. Jocelyn was, but about that no one seemed quite clear. Even the young man's cheerful sweet-temperedness was apt to be overclouded by her snappishness.

He had expected at least to find Oonagh, who was kind to him and seemed to have a timid liking for him. But her soft angelic face amid its aureole of gold was absent. Nor Nora, nor even Miss Pen, nor the one he had wished to see perhaps most of all was visible.

He sat very depressedly on the edge of his chair, looking at a spot in the carpet which was extremely threadbare, although he didn't realise the fact. He wore a frock-coat and a top hat as though he were visiting in Grosvenor Square. His hostess hated the habiliments as being English. Carbery wore grey suits all day and every day in the country. Why couldn't he do as Carbery did?

The young man delivered his message. Carbery

had had to meet his sister, who had been away from home, and hoped to bring her to pay her respects to-morrow.

"You're making a long stay," said the old lady.

Young Jocelyn turned very red.

"I'm afraid I am, rather," he answered with a humility which disarmed her. "I find the country . . . and . . . and the people here very attractive."

"You're not the first Englishman that did that," said Thisbe, relaxing.

He looked up at her shyly.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to allow you to think me an Englishman," he said. "I happen to have property in England, but I am really Irish. At least my father and mother were, though I was born in England."

"That's good enough," said Thisbe. "You can't go behind your father and mother. I think I did hear now that you were Irish. No wonder I forgot. Your accent——"

"I can't help that. I was brought up in England, and was at English schools, of course."

"I've no patience with the Irish parents who bring up their sons in England," said Thisbe, vehemently. "They're neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. The present representative of our family, Lord Creggs, is a case in point. He never comes over here, and never wants to. To him we are a nation of savages. The things that make us proudest of being De La Poers he knows nothing of. He thinks Fate played him a shabby trick in giving him an Irish title instead of an English one."

"Indeed, madam, you have been misinformed," put in the young man eagerly. "The things Creggs is proudest of are his Irish ancestry and his Irish name. His grandfather—I needn't tell you that—had a grievance against the country because his favourite

brother was shot during the tithe war. So they have lived in England ever since. And then the property—— "

Thisbe's face had turned quite red.

" May I ask," she said stiffly, " by what right you are defending Lord Creggs, the Head of the Family, to me ? "

Something humorous flashed through the bewilderment of the young man's face.

" I was at school with Creggs," he said ; " I only thought you were misjudging the poor fellow."

" I am quite incapable of misjudging the Head of the Family. Although . . . there has been little communication between the two branches of the family for years back."

" I believe Creggs is very unwilling that that state of things should continue," Mr. Jocelyn said, a most ingenuous blush overspreading his handsome face.

" Are you his ambassador ? "

" I know the state of his mind as well as any man."

" You've been keeping it to yourself. Let me see, you have been at Athclea three months ? "

" I'm afraid I have. Carbery and Miss Aubrey are the kindest people in the world. They won't hear of my going. Yet I must go soon. As for Creggs, he thinks you'd show him the door. One doesn't talk of things—— "

" I should know how to treat Lord Creggs as the Head of the Family," said the old lady, with uncompromising stateliness.

But the young man was gazing absorbedly from the window.

" Miss De La Poer, might I . . . may I go and speak to your niece ? There she is, walking down the furrow. I have a special message from Miss Aubrey for her," he said.

The eagerness in his face was apparent enough.

Something like a light broke over Thisbe's face. She rapped her stick sharply on the floor, and spoke to herself.

"England has its advantages," she said.

"Which we don't concede," said Mr. Jocelyn, "although we set up our tents there sometimes, and find it a not inhospitable land."

"I wasn't addressing my remarks to you," said Thisbe, a smile softening the asperity of the speech. "Yes—yes, you may join my grand-niece."

She spoke as though Molly were at least a royal person.

CHAPTER XV

THE DISCLOSURE

Molly smiled as she watched young Jocelyn come along the furrows towards her. She shaded her eyes with her hands even beyond the brim of her honey-coloured hat with its twist of pink ribbon, about as fascinating a head-gear as Molly could have worn. Her frock of pink print had somewhat scandalised her aunts and sisters. They thought it like a dairymaid's or a housemaid's. Molly had answered that she didn't see why the dairymaids and housemaids should be allowed to monopolise all the pretty things.

"You are like one of your own flowers," said the young fellow as he reached her side, blushing as he made his little speech. "Forgive me, Miss Molly; I know one ought to be fifty to pay a compliment like that."

Molly smiled at him. There was no indication that at the first sight of his figure in the distance her heart had leaped up, and had then fallen disgusted at its own

folly. As though this immaculately clad, slight young gentleman was the least bit in the world like—any other person, any very tall big person. Her eyes and her thoughts had a way of playing her tricks these days.

The larks were rising all around them now in the long field, almost at their feet, it seemed.

"I think I should like to be a farmer," the young fellow said; "to work among surroundings like this would be delightful."

"It isn't always May," answered Molly, laughing. "It is bleak enough here through the winter and early spring."

"It doesn't seem to have done you much harm," he said, looking at the milk and roses of her face.

"I am used to it," she replied.

"And the birds are used to you. How fearless they seem!"

"They see me here day after day. I love them so much. I often pause from my work to say, 'You dear creatures!'" Molly's voice was the tenderest of caresses. "Do you know," she went on, "I think that the birds are the very wittiest of God's inventions?"

"I confess I should not have thought of the word," he said, looking vaguely disturbed, as though the application might be a little profane.

"It is the only word," said Molly. "Look at the shape of the little body, the head on one side, the bright eye; above all, the delightful tail? Yes, the Creator was in a frolicsome mood when He made the birds."

"You are too clever for me, Miss Molly. I don't always follow you. But I should like to see things through your eyes."

"You would have to live as I do. Over there in the wood the bluebells are fairies dancing, and the anemones are the fairies of the wind. Am I talking like a book? I've picked up the way from Mr. Beecham, our delightful

literary florist. One thinks of things here in the solitude and the open air."

"I have never seen the wood," he said enviously.

"What! never seen our wood? But of course you came in winter. It was our fairyland all through our childhood. Come and see it!"

She put down the hoe upon which she had been leaning as she uttered her frank unconscious invitation. Then she pulled off her gardening gauntlets and laid them upon the hoe.

"I must trust Brother Magpie not to steal them," she said, laughing. "Do you know that we had Brother Fox in our Irish hagiology long before St. Francis, long before an American made a humorous use of him? Brother Fox stole the tongue out of St. Kieran's boots. So the Saint excommunicated him till he repented."

She told him the legend as they walked round the flowery headland of the fields together. A pair of old, yet keen eyes watched them from the castle windows, where Thisbe sat, idle for once, with her hands leaning on her cane.

"Better England," she muttered, "than the other side of the Lough and her mother's people. I have known for a long time that Molly was not safe. Creggs lifted up his wife to his own rank. It is different with a woman."

The wood skirted the head of the field. A little swinging wooden gate gave access to it. They entered and the gate fell to behind them. The wood was peopled with uncounted birds, rabbits, squirrels, moles, hedgehogs, to say nothing of humbler creatures. The trees were tall and slender, making a roof of green feathery foliage far above. The trees stood in glades. The bracken repeated the glades. Under the green fronds the bluebells and the wood anemones were indeed

dancing on the green moss. The sky and the floor of the wood had changed places. Overhead was green, below was the fairy blue.

"What a delightful wood!"

"It goes far back, and even climbs the mountain some way," said Molly. "Do you wonder that we made it the scene of all our fairy stories?"

"I do not," he replied. "It is like Fairyland."

They walked down one of the glades filled with green light. It reminded Molly of the dim green light in the house in the Glen, where in every old-fashioned mirror, in all bright surfaces, you caught the reflection of leaves. The memory troubled her. Presently, when Alison Graham reigned there, the longing she had had for the mountain and the mountain people all her life, as though her mother had transmitted her own ache to the child, would be exorcised. It should be exorcised, said Molly, with a darkening of her face.

Then she was aware that young Jocelyn was speaking.

"It is very good of you to have taken me here," he said gratefully. "You are always so busy."

She was about to say that it was the merest exercise of hospitality, but some intuition that it would cloud the pleasure on the pleasant young face prevented her.

"I am always glad when any one likes the wood," she said instead. "I feel as if it were my own personal property. I wish it were mine instead of belonging to Lord Creggs."

He looked at her eagerly.

"Your aunt thinks Creggs a curmudgeon," he said; "we've been talking about the poor fellow. I know Creggs. He would do anything for his unknown cousins."

"I think he has behaved handsomely," said Molly, impartially. "Only for his kindness in letting us still enjoy Creggs we should be homeless."

"He would have been a brute if he didn't," said the young gentleman, energetically.

"Come, you mustn't call my cousin names," said Molly, roguishly. "It is really very good of him, for we have never been civil to his branch of the family. I am only afraid that the time may come when he will marry, and his wife have a fancy for Creggs. Then we should be homeless."

"He would never turn you out. He isn't that sort at all."

"I should be glad all the same if things were on a more secure foundation. You see, I am the only business man of the family. After all, we can't expect Lord Creggs to remain indefinitely out of his own house."

They had come to another little gate in the wood-path, and paused, leaning upon it.

"Miss Molly," said Mr. Jocelyn, suddenly, "look at me."

Molly turned and regarded him. He looked a little pale and agitated. Her heart sank with a foreboding of disagreeable things. Was he going to make love to her? She was not ready for that . . . yet. A week ago she would have said she never would be ready. But things somehow had altered. With Alison Graham in the Glen, even Creggs would not be the same. And she had liked Mr. Jocelyn from the beginning. Perhaps she might grow to like him better—if but he would give her a little time.

His next words relieved her.

"I am an impostor, Miss Molly," he said, with a tragic seriousness.

In her relief her face came out quite sunshiny from the cloud which had momentarily darkened it, and she laughed aloud.

"You are not the real Mr. Jocelyn after all?" she said.

"I am not," he answered, not sharing her gaiety. "I have only been pretending to be him all the time."

"Still, as we don't know him, it doesn't very much matter. Perhaps there is no such person?"

"I don't believe there is—at least not the Jocelyn I pretended to be. You see my name is really Jocelyn."

"Then you are he, after all?"

"Miss Molly, you are laughing at me. But it is a very serious matter to me. It was that madcap, Carbery, suggested it to me. Believe me, it was foreign to all my traditions. I only meant just to look and go away again."

"And you have looked for three months."

"While all my affairs are in confusion at home. I have a most exacting man of business. The telegrams he has sent after me! He was my father's man of business before me, and I think my calling myself Jocelyn makes him suspect that I am up to all manner of mischief. He grows more imperative. I think if I don't go soon he will come after me."

"Well, you're not up to any mischief, you know," said Molly, cheerfully.

"You think not?"

"Since there isn't any Mr. Jocelyn, I don't see that any one has cause of complaint against you. Perhaps, if there was, he wouldn't mind changing places with you and attending to all those affairs."

The pseudo Mr. Jocelyn made a wry face.

"Wouldn't he, though?" he said. "He doesn't know Darbishire, that's all. I suppose there are some people who like that sort of thing. I've often wished to escape from it all and go tramping, with a few artist's tools, through France and Germany and Italy. I'm a great duffer at most things, Miss Molly, but I can paint a little bit. I should stay at out-of-the-way inns and

farmhouses. Or I should hire a gipsy van, and wander over the Continent at my pleasure."

"I should love that too," said Molly, "if I hadn't my own work to do."

A light broke over the young fellow's face.

"Would you really?"

Molly had incautiously brought on herself the thing she most wished to avoid.

"If it might happen some day that we should do it together!" he went on. "I've been in love with you ever since I saw you. I think I knew I was going to be. Ever since I began to think about things I wanted to know you. Do you know what the feeling is like? Don't look away from me." Molly had averted her head from his question. "Don't answer me yet. I will go away and come again if you like. I hadn't meant to be so sudden. Do you think you could ever care for me, darling?"

"Give me a little while," said Molly, trembling. "I do like you very much indeed. Oh, not yet,"—for he had made a movement towards her.

"Did you think I was going to kiss you, darling?" he asked eagerly. "I would not, not for worlds, till you were ready to kiss me. You have given me a thousand times more encouragement than I dared hope for. I shall be so happy even waiting."

"Don't be too happy," said Molly, imploringly. "If, after all——"

"Why, I shouldn't blame you. But I am not afraid, Molly, dearest Molly. You have avoided me of late. I was afraid of your friendliness when we did meet. Upon my word, I was frightfully down on my luck. Only for Miss Oonagh's goodness to me, I should have gone away. . . . I wonder what they will all say to me for the deception I have practised? I don't seem to mind so much now you have forgiven me."

He lifted her hand from the gate on which it rested and kissed it, and she permitted it.

"If you think your aunt could endure me," he said, "I think I have courage to go back and tell her now about my deception. The sooner it is done the better. Perhaps she won't kick me out. Will you come with me . . . Molly . . . and help me through?"

Sudden laughter danced into Molly's eyes.

"To tell her you have been masquerading as Mr. Jocelyn and that there is no such person? She will say that he would be no concern of hers if there were. Do you know we have been talking all this time, and you haven't told me who you are since you aren't Mr. Jocelyn, and yet you are Mr. Jocelyn?"

A look of consternation and pleasure mingled came into the lad's face.

"You have been taking me on trust," he said, "and I thought you knew all the time. Maybe you will unsay what you have said when I tell you. I am your cousin Creggs, Molly!"

"My cousin Creggs!"

"Jocelyn Walter Rupert Chandos De Vere De La Poer, Lord Creggs," he said.

"Come right away to Aunt Thisbe," said Molly, catching him by the hand.

She was yet young enough to be eager over a sensation.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

"Not too suddenly," Molly reminded him, as though it was not she who had carried him impetuously to the drawing-room door; "you know she has a weak heart. We must not surprise her too much."

But as they came in, something of agitation must have shown itself in their faces, for the old lady stood up, and said, advancing to meet them—

"I know what you have come to tell me; I have known it for some time."

Molly stared admiringly at her.

"You knew it, Aunt Thisbe, and yet you kept it a secret? I could not have kept a secret of such magnitude all to myself."

"Magnitude!" Thisbe repeated contemptuously. "No such magnitude. It isn't quite what I expected. Still, if he's going to make you happy, I don't mind giving you my blessing. I like the lad's face. But I want to know something about him. Who is Mr. Jocelyn? Who are his people? Who are his friends? What has he got to support a wife as a girl of mine ought to be supported?"

Molly turned very red.

"You are making a mistake, Aunt Thisbe. It isn't that at all."

"This young——" began Miss Thisbe, stormily—she had nearly said "whipper-snapper," but substituted "gentleman," uttering it, however, with an air that turned it into "whipper-snapper"—"this young gentleman, if I understand rightly, asks the hand of my niece?"

"Oh no," said Molly.

"It is my most ardent desire," said the lover.

"No and yes." Thisbe frowned. "Molly, my dear, you can't play fast and loose with your word in this way. No De La Poer ever did such a thing. If Mr. Jocelyn can give a good account of himself and his family——"

"You couldn't wish for better, ma'am," said the young gentleman, losing his head.

Miss Thisbe frowned.

"Hoity toity! couldn't wish for better?" she repeated. "A De La Poer may look very high. I'm afraid you're a rather forward young man. Still, since you have chosen each other, I can only give you my blessing."

"Aunt Thisbe," said Molly, breaking in, "we didn't come to talk about such things at all."

"Then what are you talking them for?"

Thisbe was getting angry, and looking rather inclined to lay her stick about her.

"It was you, dear," said Molly, in a pacificatory tone. "You misunderstood. We came to tell you that this . . . gentleman is not Mr. Jocelyn at all."

"He is the gentleman I've known under the name."

"Yes, but that is not his real name. Lord Carbery——"

"Don't tell me it's one of Carbery's tricks. He wouldn't dare play tricks on me!"

"No, no, of course he wouldn't. As a matter of fact, this gentleman wished to see Creggs Castle and to see . . . us, without revealing his identity at first. Lord Carbery persuaded him to call himself by his first name."

"I have been longing to confess," broke in the culprit.

"Upon my word, you've kept yourself in check a

long time. So you've been gaining my niece's affections under false pretences? Remember that I withdraw all I said to you as Jocelyn. And if you are not he, who are you? Come, I can see your name is no credit to you; but the least reparation you can make—— "

"My name is De La Poer," the young man said, with a crimson face.

Thisbe heard him with a gasp, but quickly recovered herself.

"The name's nothing to be ashamed of. There are De La Poers in Waterford. You will belong to them? "

"Not to the Waterford De La Poers."

"Then the Kerry. They're all good families. If you're a Kerry De La Poer I'll forgive you."

"I am not a Kerry De La Poer."

"Then what are you? How am I to know you're a De La Poer at all? Perhaps you'll be saying next you belong to our branch? "

"But I do."

"Aunt Thisbe," said Molly, fearing lest the preparation should last too long, "this young gentleman is our cousin, Lord Creggs. Will you not forgive him? "

Thisbe rose and made the deepest bow.

"I wish the Head of the Family had given me the opportunity of receiving him as his position demanded," she said, in her most stately manner.

The newly discovered Lord Creggs blushed deeply.

"If you'll only receive me as a very affectionate cousin," he said, "I shall be more than happy."

"You will stay and dine with us? "

"I should love to, if you will have me. I think Carbery will understand. I have his dogcart, so there will be no difficulty about getting back."

"Molly, my dear, Lord Creggs will dine with us," said Thisbe.

Molly knew that that meant a conference with the cook, and stood up to go, but her aunt called her back.

"How long have you known that this gentleman was Lord Creggs?" she asked.

"Only this afternoon. We came to tell you at once."

"Ah, I thought you couldn't have deceived me." The old lady put out her hands and drew Molly to her. "She has never deceived me, Lord Creggs. She is the most candid of children."

Molly's cheeks turned crimson.

"There, run away," said her aunt, releasing her. "Send Pen to me when she comes in. And listen, child! What I said to the unknown Mr. Jocelyn, I say with a thousand times more pleasure to Lord Creggs. There has been a long coldness between our branch of the family and yours. But now Molly has put an end to it. The wars of the Montagues and Capulets are over. We are all Montagues now."

Leaning over, she kissed Lord Creggs on the forehead. As for Molly, Molly felt that the tide had carried her beyond her depth. She had never meant to go with it so far. Could it be only a few hours ago since she had heard of Alison Graham, and had felt the door of her desired country slammed in her face?

She went out of the room with burning cheeks because of her aunt's trust in her, followed down the long expanse of threadbare carpet by instructions to be sure to send Pen to her, since the woman would be in hysterics if any one broke the news to her but Thisbe herself.

"I am like a poker up Pen's back," she said to the Head of the Family. "I keep her bolt upright in spite of herself."

"I am so grateful," he said modestly, "for your

kind reception of me. I know I do not deserve it. The deception I practised——"

"We will say no more about it. While my dear nephew, the late Lord Creggs, lived, I questioned none of his actions. I always say the Head of the Family can do no wrong."

The Head looked abashed.

"I'm afraid I'm rather a poor sort of a chap to represent the family," he said, "especially after my predecessor. What a noble fellow he was! I can't tell you, ma'am, how the manner of his death thrilled me. It made me immensely proud, and yet it made me feel my own unworthiness."

"Even the Head of the Family might feel that," said Thisbe, softening. "In a general way I should feel there could be no question of unworthiness. But my late dear nephew might make any one feel unworthy to succeed him."

"I wish we had been friends," said the Head, wistfully. "It has been a grief to me, since I could think about such things, that we should be estranged. I felt it keenly at the time of his death."

"My late dear nephew," said Miss Thisbe, "had, I think, no hatreds. Certain family traditions were handed down to him which he did not trouble himself to disturb. I cannot question the action of my dear brother, or my dear father before him. It was in my dear father's time—the sixteenth Lord Creggs—that the trouble arose. I think I may say for my nephew, Simon the late Lord Creggs, that had he been in my place he would have forgotten and forgiven as I am doing."

To hear Thisbe no one would suppose that she had been as bitter against the De Vere De La Poers as anybody. She spoke now as though she were conferring the royallest of favours, and in the same

spirit the Head received it, to judge by his sparkling face.

"You think he would really, do you, ma'am?" he said joyfully.

"I am sure he would. I'll tell you something that will no doubt please you. Creggs said to me, not very long before his heroic death, 'If anything should happen to me, Aunt Thisbe, I do not suppose that the new Lord will disturb you and the girls. He will have no use for a barrack like Creggs Castle, seeing that he has half a dozen fine houses to live in.'"

The speech sounded ungracious enough, but it did not present itself in that way to either the new Head or his reconciled relative.

"By Jove, he said that!" the young fellow murmured gratefully. "I am glad he thought that of me. Of course Creggs is your home, much more than it ever could be mine. I'll never disturb you, I promise. But—if you will let me do a little for you . . . later on . . . I shall have a double right. Creggs Castle needs repairs. It is my place to see that they are executed."

He spoke the last words like the Head of the Family, and Thisbe liked him the better for it, especially as he had blushed and stammered over his beginning.

"Upon my word, I begin to love the lad," she muttered to herself, and then answered him aloud—

"Your lordship is quite right. The roof sadly needs repairs. The rain has been coming in for some years past. Some of the floors are rather insecure too. Indeed the whole Castle has suffered from the damp and from long neglect. You see, the elder branch of the family has been the poor one."

"I have more money than I know what to do with," the Head answered in a conscience-stricken voice. "You will give me a free hand with the Castle?

Perhaps, if you will, Darbishire will let me stay a little longer. Business is the only thing Darbishire can understand."

"Darbishire?"

Thisbe lifted her eyebrows.

"My man of business. He devotes his life to trying to make me one."

"But the Head of the Family——"

The young fellow threw back his head with a jolly laugh.

"The Head of the Family is horribly afraid of Darbishire," he said. "It would take your spirit, ma'am, to stand up against him."

Thisbe smiled at him indulgently.

"You must have an Irish agent now," she said. "There are lots of younger sons willing to accept such positions. There is Luke Mowbray, Lord Castleconnell's son. He would cost you about twelve hundred a year. There is nothing for the gentry but agencies since those atrocious County Councils were started—more of Mr. Balfour's doings. You wouldn't believe it, my dear, but they actually give themselves now the positions we gave ourselves for centuries. So there is a glut of younger sons unprovided for. Luke has as fine a seat in the saddle as one could wish to see."

"What would he do for me?" asked the Head.

"Well, he would collect your rents. Not that there is much rent-collecting, hardly any indeed. It is mostly land given over to deer and grouse around Creggs except for the bit of park immediately surrounding it."

"I don't think I'll have Luke Mowbray, then. Darbishire will do for me. Darbishire has five hundred a year, and runs me and all my possessions."

For a moment a contempt for English materialistic

ways stirred in Thisbe's breast. Then she controlled it. The Head could do no wrong.

"As you like, my dear," she said. "Only poor Lady Castleconnell will be disappointed. You see, their younger sons had never been on their minds. The country always provided for them. But now the amount of jobbery that is being perpetrated by those horrible County Councils—Oh, Mr. Balfour! what things are done in your name! . . . Ah, here is Pen! So you have got back?"

Thisbe had sent her sister on an errand that should keep her out of the way while she saw the business of Molly and young Jocelyn through.

"I have got back, sister. How do you do, Mr. Jocelyn?"

"Now, you can tell me another time about Katty Murphy's bronchitis, and Mrs. Cleary's baby's croup. I've a bit of news for you. Sit down. Have you got your smelling salts? No; in that chair where you can faint comfortably if you want to. Now, are you ready? This gentleman whom we have known as Mr. Jocelyn is our cousin, Lord Creggs."

Pen did indeed show signs of hysterics, but they were dispelled by her sister's command to the Head to untie Pen's bonnet-strings and open her collar. Her knowledge that under her bonnet the thin parting of her hair showed and her delicacy about her neck were sufficient to ward off the attack.

"I'm sure I'm pleased to hear it," she said faintly, "especially as you seemed pleased, sister."

"Lord Creggs will dine with us, Pen. He and Molly have agreed to make a match of it."

Pen opened her eyes wide.

"I thought it would have been," she began.

"Take another sniff of the salts," her sister interposed. "I can see your wits are wool-gathering.

No wonder! Two surprises are enough for one day."

So Molly found herself being congratulated all round, and wondered hazily whether she would ever have strength of mind now to refuse to marry Lord Creggs, whose face was the worst of all in its beaming happiness. Molly noticed that when Oonagh kissed her cheek her lips were cold. But then Oonagh was the delicate, highly-wrought one of the family.

"You have made my path to the grave happy," said Thisbe in her ear as she said good night.

For a moment Molly forgot that her aunt's fanatical pride had broken her mother's heart. For a moment the vision of the little house in the Glen receded and died in distance. She remembered only Aunt Thisbe's goodness to her from childhood, and that she had always loved her best; that she was old and frail in body, and not like to stay with them very long. She was glad she had been able to make her happy, even in spite of herself and half unwillingly.

CHAPTER XVII

MISFITS

"I CONGRATULATE you, my dear," said Mrs. Lambert, taking Molly to her heart. "It is quite as it should be. Yet it might have been Oonagh without upsetting the rightness of things. And here is my infatuated Jarvis absolutely coming over next week again. How am I to tell him?"

"Don't tell him," said Molly, who was a bit tired of being congratulated. "Let him find out for himself. I'm sure it's obvious enough."

"On Lord Creggs's part. It makes me in love with him myself to see him such a lover. It is a tribute to all women. No, my dear. I shall write to Jarvis, and then he can come or not as he wishes. He said, poor boy, that he wouldn't miss the day in the Gap for anything."

The anniversary of Mrs. Lambert's marriage was approaching. Every year she had signalised it by some festivity planned for the girls at Creggs. This year it was to be a picnic to the Gap, a wild and lovely valley which showed itself as an opening in the line of mountains, and thus derived its name. It was to be a memorable festivity, for quite an influx of young people had come into the intimate circle since last year, when Mrs. Lambert had been able to beat up only her nephew and a couple of sailors from the gun-boat which had put into the Lough.

The sailors were to be had this year as well, and a couple of lads from the barracks at Ballintogher. And of course there were Lord Creggs and Lord Carbery, and Miss Aubrey and her friend Miss Carstairs, and Minna Irwin, the rector's daughter.

"It is becoming quite a dissipated neighbourhood," said Mrs. Lambert, who loved to give a good time to young people. "I should look forward so to enjoying myself on Wednesday, were it not for poor Jarvis!"

"Jarvis is a sensible fellow," answered Mr. Lambert —as usual his wife's confidant. "He'll enjoy himself all right. He wouldn't have come if he had meant to be a kill-joy. I look to see Jarvis the gayest of the gay."

"I wonder why Nora's affair with Carbery is hanging fire," Mrs. Lambert said. "I never thought Molly would have been the first. Upon my word, if he shilly-shallies much longer, Creggs ought to ask his intentions. It's Creggs's place, isn't it? as Head of the Family."

"Nonsense, Mary. A man can't put a revolver to another man's head like that. I don't believe it's ever done in real life, any more than in real life a man asks a girl in so many words, 'Will you marry me?' Let the young couple alone; Nora looks happy enough."

"I wonder why they have proposals in the books, then. To be sure, you never proposed to me, John. You always took it for granted. I thought it was your conceit, and that other people did the right thing."

"You wouldn't rob the poor novelist of his stock-in-trade. No, my dear; a man is a muff if he doesn't know a woman's preferences long before it comes to the proposing stage. Yours were plain enough."

Mrs. Lambert dealt her spouse a playful box on the ear, and went about her preparations for her picnic.

"Carbery looks worried," she thought, as she mixed her mayonnaise sauce. That was a thing she never allowed her cook to do for her. "And I'm none so sure that I'm satisfied about Molly either. Well, I suppose even with so charming a fellow as Creggs it may happen that he is the one who loves and she the one who consents to be loved. And yet she ought to care for him if there is no one else. And who could there be in Molly's life that I wouldn't know about?"

It had become less and less possible for Molly to return on the road she had taken. One of Lord Creggs's first acts after he had revealed himself was to settle on each of his cousins such a sum as seemed wealth judged by the unexacting standards of Creggs Castle.

"The very dress I stand up in is his," said Molly to herself, as she fastened a rose in the belt of her new habit the morning of the picnic. She was looking in the glass as she spoke, and had reason to be satisfied with what she saw there. The blue cloth was exquisitely made. Molly and Oonagh and Aunt Thisbe

had been to Dublin and spent a week at the Shelbourne, while they shopped for themselves and the two left at home, and the result was equally creditable to them and the Grafton Street modistes.

It was true that there was a little hitch in the affair between Nora and Lord Carbery. This day of the picnic it became apparent for the first time to Nora herself.

Part of the fun of the picnic in the Gap consisted of the fact that as many of the party as were young enough or adventurous enough rode up the mountain on mountain ponies, hired for the day.

Of course Nora would not ride; neither would Oonagh. They sat contentedly in the waggonette which the stoutest pair in Mr. Lambert's stables pulled up the steep road.

Molly chose to ride; so did Lord Carbery, of course; so did Mr. Anson and Miss Aubrey and Miss Carstairs, and the pair of handy men, and Captain Stapleton. All the men wanted to ride.

It was at this moment of bustle when every one was selecting his or her pony—Lord Carbery had had charge of that, and a whole herd of ponies in the hands of boys, as wild-headed and bright-eyed as themselves, was gathered on the lawn of Castle Lambert—that Lord Creggs, with one hand on the flank of a pony, noticed that all the other men were going to ride.

He gave one wistful look at the cavalcade. Molly was already up, and Carbery was attending to her stirrups.

"I think I'll stay by the waggonette," he said to nobody in particular.

"Hello, Creggs, aren't you going to ride?" called out Mr. Lambert.

"Not if there's room for me in the waggonette," he answered, strolling towards it.

Oonagh and Nora and Miss Irwin had been laughing at the antics of Lieutenant Fortescue and Mr. Mayne of the *Seahorse*, who rode, or pretended to ride, like . . . sailors. Still, as Lord Creggs leant on the back of the waggonette and asked if they could make room for him, there was pleasure in the three faces that turned to his; for no matter how amiable girls are, they do not like to be entirely deserted by the male members of the party. Perhaps there was more than the ordinary pleasure in Oonagh's gentle eyes as she looked towards him. Three feminine skirts were drawn closely together, revealing an unsuspected amount of room in the waggonette.

"Better come with us, Willoughby," said Lord Creggs to young Willoughby from the barracks, who was considering whether his remarkably long legs wouldn't misbecome the mountain ponies.

"All right," said Willoughby, glad to have the matter settled for him.

"Keep a seat for me," called out little Mr. Mayne, "for I'm sure to come to grief before long."

"All right; you shall have the box-seat by Mr. Lambert," Lord Creggs called back to him as the waggonette started.

Mrs. Lambert had watched the proceedings from the victoria in which she, Thisbe, and Pen were seated. They were going to reach the Gap by a circuitous route which would cut off the steepest of the hills.

"I was just thinking," she said, as they followed the waggonette, "that I'd have to get John to interfere. I was afraid all the boys were going to ride, and then what pleasure would there have been for those three girls cooped up there together? What a delightful fellow Lord Creggs is! For of course he wanted to ride with Molly."

She was about to say that Carbery ought to have

stayed, but even her frank indiscretion stopped short of that.

"He is a delightful fellow!" said Thisbe, her face beaming. She was becoming infatuated about the Head of the Family. "If only our dear nephew could have known him!"

"I hope that madcap won't lead Jarvis into scrapes," said Mrs. Lambert, as Miss Aubrey and her nephew passed them.

Miss Aubrey, whose straight, fair hair fell, fine as a child's, about her peaked little face, called out farewell to the carriage people as she passed them. The Englishman, looking as immovable as ever, rode his pony solemnly at her side.

"If only Jarvis would transfer his affections there," thought the match-making aunt. "I think she's really a sweet girl at heart, although such a minx. Perhaps she would only make fun of Jarvis, though. He's too good for that. She may laugh as much as she likes at his English solemnity, but I won't have him made fun of."

It seemed to be a day of misfits. Molly had not noticed at first that Creggs had chosen the waggonette, and that Lord Carbery was by her side. In a sense she was relieved not to have her *fiancé*. He made demands on her that she felt herself unable to answer; and the more she liked and admired him the more difficult her position became.

She looked over her shoulder at Lord Carbery as they rode up a steep little boreen on the mountain-side. Then she smiled to herself. It was easy to see where his heart was. Beautiful as was the day, and the air exhilarating, he looked gloomy and anxious, and kept his face ahead with a most melancholy expression clouding its habitual good humour. They were walking now, the ponies dislodging a stone here

and there as they mounted, and sending it clattering down the hill.

Suddenly Molly burst into laughter. She didn't feel very light at heart herself, but the gloom of her cavalier tickled her irresistibly.

"If you feel like that about it, Lord Carbery," she said, in answer to the amazed question in his light eyes, "why didn't you say so before? I assure you I left Mr. Mayne inconsolable by choosing you."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," he stammered. "The fact is, I'd rather ride with you than with any one else. Alice Carstairs is an awfully nice girl, but too . . . too . . . lively. Just listen to her and those two fellows laughing!"

"Besides, Mayne's gone back, or fallen off, or something," he went on, rising in his stirrups to look back the way they had come. "You couldn't have ridden with him, a madcap like him. He wouldn't be fit to take care of you. Of course . . . I ought to have stayed behind and let Creggs ride. I'm a stupid fellow."

"It was not *I* who objected to *your* company," Molly reminded him. As a matter of fact, she was glad to have him beside her. It wouldn't do Nora any harm to miss him for a while, since they were so tremendously in love with each other.

"Just look at your sister and Mr. Anson," she said. They had come out now from between the hedgerows, and could see the long stretch of ascending bridle-path before them, strewn with stones, and skirting the edge of a precipice. Just at the top the two riders were silhouetted against the sky.

"By Jove, they have got ahead!" said Lord Carbery, looking up. "I believe Edie wants Anson to race her down the valley. It isn't the safest thing to do even with these surefooted beasts. I'm glad

she's with a steady fellow like Anson. He won't let her go. Oh, by Jove I believe she's off! And Anson after her." The two riders had disappeared over the edge of the hill. "I do wish Edie would be more careful."

"She's a good horsewoman," said Molly, anxious, but trying to comfort him.

"She's been more used to English roads of late years, and they are like billiard-tables."

"But the ponies are so surefooted. I never heard of an accident with one of them, though they will always walk on the edge. Just look at this fellow."

Carbery glanced back over his shoulder at her. They were riding single file.

"You're all right," he said; "you're riding steadily. The little beggars know just what they can do."

Molly's steed at this moment dislodged a stone, which went leaping down the side of the precipice.

Carbery muttered something between his teeth, and pushed on at a quickened pace to the top of the hill. When he had come in sight of the next valley he paused and waited for Molly, who was coming more slowly after him. He had dismounted by the time she overtook him, and she noticed with sympathy that his ruddy hues were quite faded.

"They must have scampered," he said, "but they've done it all right. See, they are nearly over the brow of the next hill. They must have gone like the wind down this slope. I shall have something to say to Edie about it."

"Ah, well," Molly answered consolingly, "the dangerous part of the journey is over. The rendezvous is just ahead of them, and if they were to reach the next valley it is as safe as a feather-bed. You know Glen Nesh?"

"I know," he replied, still wearing the slightly

haggard look of anxiety his sister's exploit had brought to his face. "You are going to dismount here, Miss Molly. A roll down below there wouldn't be very pleasant."

Molly dismounted. Together they stood looking along the valley before them. Far below a brawling and bright little river clattered over its stones. Little copses of pine studded the deep descent here and there, and the floor of the valley was diapered with the gold and purple of the flowers that clustered thickly about the marshy banks of the river. A hundred little streams crossed the stony path ahead of them, dropping from the boulders above in long silver and golden fringes, spreading themselves momentarily in little shallow pools, where they found a level space before streaming in tiny waterfalls over the edge of the path to join their shouting little comrades, all making their way to the river. On either side the hills rose gray, streaked in places with the rust-colour of the iron the streams washed down. Beyond this valley other hills had taken on the illusion of the distance, and were violet.

There was not a homestead in sight. The trees clustered so thickly round the ruin of a little monastery which the valley contained that it was invisible. Below, near the water's edge, a group of three tall stone pines marked the graves of the monks.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE

After that headlong descent was over, Miss Aubrey, as soon as she could check her little steed, turned in her saddle and looked at her companion.

Her own heart was beating and her colour was high. Her eyes shone like stars in the shadow of her fell of hair, and her lips were smiling. He looked as imperturbable as ever. His gray riding-coat, made in Savile Row, fitted him to perfection and well became his spare figure. He had lost nothing of his spick-and-span air. His sleek, dark head was quite unruffled. If he had felt any excitement over that scurry down the mountain side, it only displayed itself in the tightening of his lips.

"Well?" she flashed at him, with the look of a naughty child.

"Well," he repeated.

"What did you do it for?"

"Do what for?"

"Follow me down the mountain. You were at my shoulder all the time. I thought to have left you behind."

"Why?"

"I didn't suppose you'd do it, a sensible Englishman like you. You knew it was dangerous."

"You put my life in danger as well as your own. Of course I could do nothing but follow. There was the off-chance, a very off-chance, I admit, that I might be able to catch the little beast by the reins if I saw he was likely to go over. We should probably have gone together, in that case. We owe our safety to the excellent mountaineering of our steeds."

He patted his, which stood more than commonly high, on his flanks. They were going at a walk now, the ponies picking their way through the stones of the streams that had made a lodgment on the bit of level path.

"I didn't want to put your life in danger," she frowned; "I didn't expect you to come. I wanted to frighten you, that was all. I don't believe there

was really much danger. These Orsons are as sure-footed as cats."

"There was plenty of danger," he assured her steadily. His just resentment was dying out. As the spark of devilry faded from Miss Aubrey's face he noticed for the first time that it looked pinched and sad. "And you did frighten me. I dare say you frightened your brother, if he was near enough to see."

They had begun the next ascent now to the Glade of Silver Birches where their table-cloth was to be spread.

"Perhaps I wanted to frighten him," she said gloomily. "But you shouldn't have followed me. If I got killed that is no reason why you should get killed."

"I beg your pardon," he said. "That is a reason. If you were to be killed while in my charge the only decent and possible thing for me to do was to be killed also. Not that I liked the prospect. Indeed I disliked it uncommonly."

"I know," she said, and shot another glance at him, "you were hating me for a horrid Irish hoyden, for whom you felt compelled to put your life in danger, however much you disapproved of and disliked her."

"Come, Miss Aubrey, you are putting words into my mouth and thoughts into my mind."

"Anyhow," she went on dejectedly, "I did not think you would follow me—at least not clatter after me like that. I thought you would pick your way down carefully, and then pitch into me tremendously if you found me with whole bones at the bottom. I confess I didn't anticipate not having whole bones. As I said before, I have implicit confidence in these creatures."

"But you took the chances?"

"I took the chances."

Again he was struck by the note of dejection in her voice, the pinched look of her little face as though a frost had fallen upon it. And what did she mean by saying that perhaps she had wanted to frighten her brother? During his short acquaintance with her she had been the gayest of the gay. Even her hoydenishness had sat well on her because of her childish looks, and the tricks she played were never of the horse-play, practical-joke order, which he had sometimes encountered among very fine folk and which his soul detested. There was something the matter with Miss Aubrey. Jarvis, all of a sudden, felt a desire to take her face between his hands as one might take a child's face and look down into the eyes, and ascertain what trouble it was that dimmed their usual clear, roguish joyousness.

They reached the Glade of Silver Birches, to find it occupied by Mrs. Lambert's servants who had started earlier in the day, and were now laying a table-cloth on the green moss, with its innumerable little crags that made such delightful seats for the annual picnickers.

"We are too early," said Jarvis; "let us go on. We can let the ponies start grazing here. They have probably had enough of it."

They left the ponies where they were, and followed the little road further over the crest of the next hill into Glen Nesh, clothed in slender young trees from the road's edge to the sky-line.

The road followed the river bank for a little while, then crossed a bridge, and ascended into the birches and alders on the other side.

On the bridge the two paused and leant over to look into the brown water, that was bronze-gold where it had a reflection of the sunlight. Miss Aubrey had tried to recover her spirits after they had left the Glade

behind, but she was plainly out of sorts and could not forget whatever troubled her for long.

Now as she leant over the bridge she rested her elbows on the velvety lichens and mosses, her chin on her folded hands. She looked along the course of the river-bed, where it wound enchantingly about its boulders, as though her eyes did not see it. What new expression was it on her lips, something of pain, of chastening? It startled the young man, who had hitherto only thought of her as a pretty hoyden, and had been slightly fretted as things were by the atmosphere of high spirit she created about her. Things had not been going particularly well with Jarvis. In fact, he had an idea that he would not come back to Ireland for a long time again even though Aunt Mary was so fond of him, and he was attached to her and Uncle John. The girl whose face he was watching now, who seemed unconscious of his scrutiny, appealed to him far more than that Edith Aubrey of infectious high spirits, who had, he had thought unjustly, no depth of character to discover.

She looked up at him suddenly and surprised him in the midst of his thoughts—gave him a new one indeed, and in his surprise he blurted it out.

"You did it because you were unhappy," he said.

"Did what?" she said, averting her gaze from him again.

"That madcap thing. You were too unhappy to remember it was dangerous, or to care."

Her hands went up either side her cheeks, and hid her face. He stood watching her wistfully. Suddenly a large tear fell on a bit of pink moss between the stones of the bridge, and lay there glittering like a dewdrop.

"Never mind," he said stupidly. "I dare say things will come right. We have all to bear these things . . . dear."

The tears were coming fast as rain, and they hurt Jarvis's heart. If only she wouldn't cry! It was horrible to see her shoulders shake like that. She had always been as playful as a kitten.

He couldn't have kept back the caressing "dear" for the life of him. He felt that the form of his attempted consolation was abject beyond words, and hoped she had not understood him. Was it possible that he had hinted even remotely at his own trouble, which he fancied fondly was his own secret and his only?

Suddenly Miss Aubrey looked up at him, and her look was a grateful one. She didn't seem to mind that the tears had disfigured her face, and as she dabbed at her cheeks with her handkerchief she tried to smile.

"You are awfully kind!" she said. "And I am so sorry! I meant to . . . I meant to have . . . asked for your hat to-day to do an omelette trick in. And now . . . you are heaping coals of fire on my head."

He felt more comfortable at once, since her tears seemed to be drying up.

"Never mind," he said cheerfully, "I wouldn't have given it to you, you know."

"You wouldn't?" said Miss Aubrey. "I thought you would have handed it over without turning a hair, just as you played at that ridiculous candle game the other night. And never got a spot of grease on yourself either."

"I've played it before," he said.

"Ah, you have. I saw it played in English drawing-rooms, but it never amused me. I don't know why I wanted to make you play it. In my heart I hate all such things. If you had given me your hat I'd have done it no harm. I don't see any joke in spoiling people's clothes. But now . . . you've made me so ashamed!"

"Don't take it to heart," he said kindly. "And as for . . . the other . . . trouble . . . what you were crying about . . . it will mend——"

Something in his voice betrayed his meaning. She lifted her head and looked at him. Her face was flushed, but not with the shyness of a girl's love, and something of indignation was in its expression.

"You think," she said, "that I am in love with somebody."

"Well, why not?" he asked helplessly.

"Because if you knew me at all you'd know that I'm quite incapable of such a thing. I never cared for any man in my life except Val. It was Aunt Helen's fault that I had to go and live with her in that horrid London. Oh, the wrench that was! I was the most unhappy child of fifteen in all Ireland when I had to go. The home-sickness! I only lived till I should be free to choose, till I could come back to Val."

"But you are happy now?"

Miss Aubrey turned away her face, and again he saw her shoulders heave. But this time she gained control over herself.

"And now Val does not want me," she said quietly.

So that was the cause of her trouble. She was jealous of her brother. This time he offered no consolation. He was not eloquent, and nothing occurred to him to say. Perhaps she thought him unsympathetic.

"You don't know how I have *lived* to come back to Val," she said, turning swiftly on him her small round pale face and flinging her hair back with the sudden motion. "And I was not prepared, not in the least. The first weeks were just what I had pictured them! Oh, how happy they were! Then I discovered there was something wrong with Val. Then I saw them together, and the thing flashed on

me as though I had always known it. Yet how strange it is! Val! Val! of all men! We used to mock at people who were in love. We always said we were enough for each other. I did everything he did, rode barebacked horses, and climbed trees and haystacks, and fell in the pond—the mud was horrible—and joined them when he set out to climb to the Eagle's Nest on Dunroe. We were caught and brought back then. It was the only time I ever saw the pater really angry with us. And now to come home expecting to be everything to him, after those years of bondage . . . and to find . . . this!"

"It is hard," he said.

"Hard!" she echoed. "There's something, something of trouble grown up between Val and me. Perhaps . . . he never really wanted me back. Perhaps he would have preferred I hadn't quarrelled with Aunt Helen, but had stayed where I was. Now, there is no place for me in the world."

He had not an inconvenient sense of humour, and he did not smile.

"You wouldn't have it otherwise, I suppose," he said awkwardly. "I mean supposing it is for your brother's happiness. A man in his position ought to marry——"

"Do you think I don't know it? But I always thought it would be years and years ahead. As for Val's happiness, why it is all I care about. Still . . . still——"

"We ought to be going back," he said, not feeling conscious however of any decided wish to leave his present quarters.

"I suppose we ought," she assented; "we've been here a good many minutes."

"Half an hour," said Jarvis, looking at his watch.

"I never should have thought it. But you've done me no end of good, just listening to me, you know. I don't know how I came to tell you. I should have supposed you'd be the last person. However, that's one thing about English people—they don't laugh and they are kind. Oh, yes, they are kinder than we are. I would never acknowledge it to Aunt Helen, but it's true."

"You don't feel so bad now you've told me," said Jarvis, his face brightening.

"It has taken a lot of the sting out of it. Not that you said much . . . I don't think you said anything."

"I'm not much of a hand at saying."

"And you forgive me—about the hat? and the candle? . . . It was a horrid game. Yet I have seen duchesses play at it."

"Ah," said Jarvis, thoughtfully, "I belong to the middle classes. But of course there is nothing to forgive."

He took her outstretched hand and raised it to his lips; then he reddened, half afraid she would think it a silly thing to do. But Miss Aubrey did not seem to mind.

"Do you think you could race me from here to where that blackfaced sheep is standing?" she asked pensively, as they turned their faces towards the Glade of Silver Birches.

"I think I could," said Jarvis, and he ran with her, to the amazement of the mountain sheep. Fortunately they had no audience more critical.

"I didn't think you had it in you," she said. "I should have thought you wouldn't run for worlds. I didn't do it to try you," she added hastily, being aware of a dawning suspicion in his face. "Henceforth we are good comrades, and I shall no more play tricks on

you than I should on Val. If I had any heart for playing tricks!"

Yet it is safe to say she was the life and soul of the picnic, as she usually was of any such gathering in which she took a part.

But there seemed a cloud between Lord Carbery and Nora. He no longer sought her side assiduously, though he looked miserable enough away from it. He seemed to keep close to his sister's side. Perhaps that accounted for her gaiety. Anyhow her high spirits flowed incessantly. She was more madcap than ever. And the hostess was duly grateful to her.

"Little Mayne and Edith Aubrey saved the occasion, John," she said to her husband at night. "At one time it seemed that things were going to be a bit flat. But those two kept things going. The dancing was entirely their idea."

"When I was young," quoth Mr. Lambert, "that was a successful picnic which resolved itself into pairs whose object primarily was to avoid other pairs. Young people seem more gregarious nowadays."

"Or less gregarious," corrected his wife, with a sigh for the old simplicity.

CHAPTER XIX

LOVERS' MEETING

As for Molly's work, it seemed too likely to come to an end. If she might only have stayed on at Creggs after her marriage she might still have been a flower farmer. But she was not to stay on at Creggs. Her marriage was fixed for the autumn. Her bridegroom had planned a wedding journey which was to take

them half round the world. Who was to carry on her little industry which had promised so well?

An offer came to her from an unexpected source, just as she was meditating a visit to Mr. Beecham, to ask advice on the subject. The daffodils and the violets might have been allowed to go back to grass. But the strawberries and the early peas, the tomato plants and the mushrooms in their hot-beds, could not be left to themselves or to wild nature.

"I should like to take up your work, Molly," said Oonagh to her one day.

"You, dear!" Molly looked at the slight delicate figure, the fair aristocratic face. "You would not be fit for it. What put such a thing into your head?"

Oonagh blushed.

"I think it was something Dr. Randal said when he was here in June. I used to see him watching me, and I suspected Aunt Thisbe had asked him for more than the trout fishing. 'Turn her out with her sister,' he said, after he had talked to me and tried my chest with his stethoscope. 'There is nothing the matter with her, only that she has been too much cooped up. Let her do as her sister does.'"

"He didn't know anything about it," said Molly, indignantly. The tradition of Oonagh's delicacy and preciousness had grown to be almost a sacred thing. "Why, you couldn't stand the wind and the weather! You could no more lift a spadeful of earth—not that you need do that—than you could fly."

"Aunt Thisbe told Dr. Randal that an outdoor life would kill me. He answered quite roughly that an indoor one would if it went on. 'Let her do as her sister does, and she will be as strong as her sister,' he said."

"Oh, come," said Molly, "I was always the hard one. And what do you want thinking of such things,

Oonagh, at all, now that we are going to give you such a good time? I dare say it has always been dull for you and Nora, but it won't be dull any longer."

A little red spot came into Oonagh's cheek.

"I don't know that we used to find it dull. Perhaps you have unsettled us. Anyhow I want to take up the work, Molly. That girl you have in your little counting-house, Miss Laffan, would help me. I shall be slow at first, I dare say, but I should learn. And perhaps in time Nora would help too. It is a mistake for girls, even ladies, to have nothing at all to do."

Molly echoed the faint sigh with which her sister's speech had concluded. The sigh was for Nora. Three weeks had elapsed since the picnic, and Lord Carbery had only made one formal call. The friendship which had seemed so suddenly to spring up, looked like dying out suddenly. And Nora had looked paler than usual, ever paler and paler since that day of the picnic; but had not given up looking as though frightened out of her seven senses whenever any one rang at the hall-door bell—an electric bell, which had been one of the Head of the Family's many innovations.

There didn't seem anything to be done. Carbery had never spoken. If he seemed now never likely to speak that was something in which no one could help.

"I wish you and Nora would do it," said Molly, "I mean take on the gardening. It brings one such peace of mind."

She started when she had said it; and again the red spot came in Oonagh's cheek; for Nora's hurt it must have been, of course, since no one had made love to Oonagh, and then coldly left her.

"I confess I love it," said Molly, a little later, "and I should be glad to think that it lived even though I had left it."

She was standing between the furrows with Oonagh by her side, looking across the little garden farm to the hedge of sweet briar which she had put in for its boundary.

"You must have such another at Altamont," said Oonagh, the colour blown into her cheek by the west wind.

Altamont was Lord Creggs's place in Hampshire.

"I couldn't play at it," said Molly, impatiently. "There is a head-gardener and a staff of under-gardeners at Altamont. Besides, I wanted to make money of it, and to need the money. I liked to be poor."

She glanced at Oonagh's charming frock of lilac batiste and her big white hat airy with chiffon.

"We are fine ladies now," she said. "Not but what you were always a fine lady, Oonagh, dear. But I wasn't. I wish I was a working woman again."

"But you are happy, Molly," said Oonagh, in a low voice. "Creggs is so good!"

"Good as gold," assented Molly. "And of course I am happy."

They went to find Miss Laffan in one of the little shanties of glass and wood which had been run up in a corner of the field for the industry. It was a slack time with the farming just now, and there was little work to be done.

"Next you must try lilies," said Molly. "The bulbs from the garden could not be bettered. You will want to shelter them. And I should have sweet pea. It is a good traveller."

Miss Laffan, who was never long absent from her post, sat at the high desk in the corner of the little house adding up figures in a ledger.

"I am making a calculation," she said, looking up as they came in. "It is about tulips and hyacinths. Mr. Beecham has the Amsterdam grower, Mr. Vanderpoot,

staying with him just now. But, of course, you will not keep on the farm, Miss De La Poer?"

"I shall not," said Molly, with a little sigh. "But my sister would like to take it over. What do you say to becoming her partner, Eily? If I had stayed on I had meant to ask you to come into partnership."

Eily Laffan flushed. She loved the work and had travelled in search of her proficiency. She had no money for a business of her own, and had looked for nothing better than to help at the management of some one else's.

"Do you really mean it, Miss De La Poer?" she asked. "If your sister would have me! I know the work, and I am never tired of it."

"I couldn't have done without you," said Molly, gratefully.

"I shall be your pupil," said Oonagh. "A very willing though quite an ignorant one."

"Take care of her, Eily," said Molly.

"I won't let her do the hard work," answered Eily Laffan.

A few days later Molly and Lord Creggs were in Ballinamona together. They were walking down the main street when they saw approaching them another couple.

"What a handsome girl!" said Lord Creggs. "Isn't she, Molly? Who is she?"

"She is very handsome," Molly replied. "I don't know her, but I fancy she must be a Miss Alison Graham. She has a farm up in the hills the other side of the Lough. That is my cousin who is walking with her. They are neighbours."

"Your cousin!" repeated Lord Creggs in surprise. "I didn't hear of him before."

"On the spindle side. You know my mother was the daughter of a farmer. We don't talk about them."

"Why not?" asked Creggs, with a little flush.

"Aunt Thisbe thinks the connection should be forgotten."

"Oh, you can't forget blood like that," said the Head of the Family, slackening his pace, and looking with friendly eyes in front of him.

The other pair had reached a street corner. Molly wondered if they would take the turn and avoid the direct meeting, but they came on. Molly could not have withheld the introduction now if she had been of the same mind as Aunt Thisbe.

"Mr. Sinclair, Lord Creggs."

Hugh Sinclair looked distantly for the moment into the bright, frank young face before him. Then his own softened, and he smiled.

"Miss De La Poer, permit me to introduce Miss Alison Graham," he said next.

The tall, fresh-coloured girl, with the great masses of fair hair twisted like a cable at the back of her head, who had been waiting without the least appearance of awkwardness, bowed and smiled. She had brought her manners from the French convent where she had been to school, and they were as excellent as her French accent and the coffee she had learned to make there.

"I am very glad to meet a cousin of my cousin's," said Creggs, after his cordial hand-clasp with Hugh Sinclair; and then fell to talking of the country which fascinated him, about which he was greedy of knowledge.

Molly listened in silence, as did the other girl. Molly was taking in every detail of Miss Graham's appearance, noting her hat, the airy bow of which was turned with a suggestion of French cleverness, her gray gown with its vest of soft white stuff, her gray Suède gloves, her parasol, her shoes that would have done no injustice to an Honourable Miss De La Poer.

"What is the good of rank in a country where

women can adapt themselves like that ?" Molly thought impatiently.

Beside her Hugh Sinclair looked rustic. Indeed Molly had not disguised from herself that he always looked just what he was, an honourable young yeoman farmer whose fathers had been on the land for many generations, who had been brought up simply but not roughly, among good old things which had been in his family from time immemorial, and had received an education better perhaps than most of his fellows, yet not sufficient to unfit him for his position in life. He was dressed for riding, and carried a little whip in one of his ungloved hands. The couple were apparently on their way to Mrs. Sweeney's, where country visitors to Ballinamona found refreshment for themselves and their beasts.

The group of four presently broke up, with more *empressement* on Lord Creggs's part than on the farmer's.

"I want to know more of your cousin, Molly," he said, as they went on.

"It is hardly likely," she answered. "Aunt Thisbe put a barrier between me and them long ago. They are as proud as we are. They will not be cap in hand to us. They are our equals or nothing. I mean my equal, since I have their blood in my veins. I needn't go to them as a fine lady."

"I hadn't thought that you would, Molly," said Creggs, simply. "As for myself, I shouldn't have thought of treating that fine-looking fellow as anything but a gentleman."

"But he isn't," said Molly, in a mood of opposition. "He's just a farmer. It is only because you are half an Englishman that you have Quixotic ideas about the possibility of mixing classes. Or, if we do, somebody has to pay for it."

As she spoke her heart burned for soreness in her breast, but nothing of it appeared in her cold voice.

"Why, Molly," Creggs said in surprise, "I had no idea you were such a stickler for rank! I'm not particular that way myself. If I think a man's a gentleman, no matter how humble his rank in life is, I always feel we are pretty much on a level."

"I know," said Molly. "That is why they adore you. You shook hands with the boatmen on the Lough the other day after they had rowed us across that extremely stiff bit of water. They liked it better than your half sovereign. You see, you can afford not to feel those distinctions. I being half a peasant am more exclusive."

She made the unbecoming jeer at herself out of sheer bitterness, and she was rewarded by seeing Creggs flush as though she had hurt him.

"You forget, Molly," he said gently, "that if you are half a peasant, I am half a bourgeois. We married into trade, which your branch of the family would never have done. I am not at all ashamed of it, and you have less cause to be. In this country—I have found out all that for myself—the good blood is very often in the cottages, and the base blood in the castles."

"How like papa you are!" cried Molly, impulsively. "Papa would have loved you. He was obliged to hate your branch of the family because somebody else hated it. But he would have taken you to his heart."

"I wish we had known each other," Creggs said wistfully.

CHAPTER XX

LOVERS' TALK

THEY went on to Mr. Beecham's after that chance meeting.

Lord Creggs already knew Mr. Beecham by repute, and it had been an arrangement of some standing that Molly should bring the two together. The florist had not been to Creggs Castle for some time. Thisbe had spoken of him with a real or assumed dry dislike since the day of Molly's engagement, and Molly was too sensitive to expose her old friend to a coldness he had done nothing to deserve. As for her, she had kept away from Ballinamona of late. But at last a visit to Mr. Beecham could no longer be deferred, and so Molly had arranged it.

They found the old man smiling and bowing in his room, which smelt like a garden, since, in addition to its usual flowers, there was a luncheon table spread there, garlanded with roses.

"I thought I might take the liberty, Miss Molly," he said. "No Creggs Arms to-day. That good woman, Mrs. Sweeney, has plenty of custom for her excellent chops and steaks and chicken and bacon. I thought you and Lord Creggs would honour me."

"It is very kind of you," said Lord Creggs, heartily. "I'm as hungry as a hunter. This magnificent air, Mr. Beecham. And your table looks. . . . How do you manage it, being a bachelor?"

"There are a great many young ladies who are very kind to me. In fact, there was a lady's hand over that table. She has only just left me. It was very clever of you to find it out, Lord Creggs."

"It looks very festive," said Molly, feeling her lips stiffen in a forced smile. She had an intuition that it was Alison Graham who had set her this absurdly festal board where the cold lamb and mayonnaise of salmon, the tongue, the crisp green lettuce, and the delicious fruits were all set in roses.

"It was meant to be," said Mr. Beecham, apparently finding nothing wrong in her smile. "The occasion, Miss Molly, my dear, if you will forgive my referring to it—

> Gather ye roses while ye may,
> Old time is still a-flying.

Have you ever noticed, Lord Creggs, how many times the poets use roses in a sad context? Miss Molly, if you would place yourself in my housekeeper's hands. The day is hot, and a little ablution perhaps—not that you look to need it.

> Oh, have you seen a white lily grow
> Before the sun has smutched it.

Ah, Mrs. Egan! Miss De La Poer would like to wash her hands."

The bright-eyed old woman who had answered Mr. Beecham's bell conducted Molly upstairs by a staircase hung with time-discoloured engravings in dark frames, along a corridor book-lined, and into a bedroom where the books not only filled the walls but overflowed on to the chairs and the floor. Fortunately there is no dust in those latitudes. The Lough wind and the mountain wind are better than any dusting apparatus yet discovered; and the books behind their brass lattices looked clean and bright.

"I do be ashamed, so I do be," said the housekeeper, apologetically, as Molly picked her way across a clear space of drugget, "of the rubbish of ould books himself does have everywhere. There's no chance to

be doing a body's self any credit, so there isn't, at all, at all."

Molly laughed, pouring out the hot water, and noticing without surprise the fresh tablet of fine soap, and the exquisite towel left for her use. Wasn't her old friend always the finest of fine gentlemen?

"I wouldn't bother about it, Mrs. Egan, if I were you," she said. "The books look so clean and nice. I don't think I'd ask for a prettier wall-lining. I think everything's quite beautiful."

"It's like you to say so, miss," answered the old woman, brightening. "I do the best I can. And sure if he hadn't that fad he'd have another. It's better thin the drink, that's what I do say, an' the card-playin' an' the company-keepin'. The last gentleman I lived with hadn't a book in the house, but then he was terrible fond o' the drink."

"I agree with you that the books are more harmless," said Molly, seriously.

"An' there's always a something—isn't there, miss?" answered Mrs. Egan, much comforted by Molly's agreement with her point of view.

When Molly returned to the sitting-room, she found another person added to the party. This was a tall, handsome, florid man with a moustache and small pointed beard, and very bright eyes under his hair that came down to a point in the middle of his forehead. He was like a Vandyke portrait. He was dressed a little more pronouncedly than Molly was accustomed to; and she was hardly surprised when he was introduced to her as Mr. Vanderpoot.

He had barely bowed over Molly's hand, with a foreign grace which she would never have thought of ascribing to a Dutchman, when he was gone.

Molly was sorry. She wanted to see more of Mr. Vanderpoot.

"I wish he had stayed," she said impulsively.

"He must be the prince of Dutch bulb-growers," said Lord Creggs. "His manners are quite courtly."

"He is so handsome," said Molly.

Mr. Beecham looked very much pleased.

"He's an excellent fellow, Vanderpoot is, and a charming fellow. He would run have away, I expect, in any case lest his presence should be an intrusion. But he had really to go. In fact, he will doubtless eat your lunch at the Creggs Arms, for he was to join Hughie and Miss Graham there at one o'clock. I wish you had heard him play the violin. He carries his with him wherever he goes. It is an Amati."

"You must bring him over to Creggs one day," said the Head of the Family. "There are a few curious old musical instruments. The organ now——"

"I have been telling him about the organ. And about Miss Molly's gift for the gardening. Ah, now, what a pity it is I lose one of my most promising pupils! Shall we begin? What can I help you to, Miss Molly, my dear?"

All through the delicate little banquet Molly's thoughts would stray to the room of the Creggs Arms where the other party of three were lunching at that moment. She said to herself that she was glad Alison Graham was so unexceptionable. It was the publican's daughters from Dublin over again. She had not heard her speak, but with that face and figure, and the quiet self-possession of her manner the girl could not wrong herself by uncouth speech. Molly remembered the creamery, and wondered if the butter-making and the milking had not reddened and coarsened the hands in the gray Suéde gloves. Although she was glad that Hugh had chosen creditably, yet she would not have been sorry to find some flaw in Alison Graham.

After lunch they strolled through the gardens and the greenhouses. Presently Molly thought she would

sit by the stone basin at the middle of the garden where there was a little fountain, below the spray of which goldfish swam round and round in an incessant shower-bath. There were seats round about; and palms, myrtles, and fuchias, which grew all the year out-of-doors, gave the place a look of the South.

Mr. Beecham's suggestion it was that Molly should rest: and she was not unwilling, though at the idea of being tired open-air Molly scoffed. She wanted to be to herself for a little while, and so she agreed with alacrity to the suggestion.

The two men went on to the glass-houses. In one, steamy with heat, Mr. Beecham paused before the oddest purple and white flower Lord Greggs had ever seen. It was more like an insect than a flower as it hung lightly on a slender stem, and the colours were on it like the bars of a tiger and again like the dappling of a snake's skin.

"What do you think of it?" Mr. Beecham asked, watching his guest's face.

"Beautiful, but uncanny. Some kind of an orchid, I suppose?"

"It is the very newest of orchids. The man who found it died of the swamp fever. Still, he had not lived in vain."

"By Jove! A human life the price of that queer thing! No wonder it looks uncanny. You're sure it isn't alive?"

"Of course it is alive. How far it is alive I wouldn't take it upon me to say. Ask the insects it eats in its natural state."

"Oh! It eats insects, does it? And it cost the life of a man to transplant it from there to here? It isn't worth it!"

"Tut-tut," said Mr. Beecham, testily. "It is worth it. A new orchid is well worth a human life.

Why, there is nothing so cheap as human life. And if you gave it that artificial value what is to become of all sorts of research? Why, the whole fabric of discovery is built up on human lives."

"So it is," agreed Lord Creggs, who was always pacificatory. "So it is. Only I couldn't help thinking of the poor beggar."

"He died very well. At the last he sent an Indian a journey of three hundred miles to place this orchid in the hands of another orchid hunter. Fortunately the Indian was faithful, and so here is the Emperor-Moth Orchid."

"It must be very valuable."

Mr. Beecham lifted his shoulders in a little shrug.

"Mere money value! We won't talk about that. It is to be my wedding present to Lady Creggs, if she will permit me the honour. Why, bless me, I have known Miss Molly from a baby! If I can't give her an orchid, and an unique one at that!"

Creggs said no more, and they joined Molly. He and Molly went part of the way home from Ballinamona by the steam tram. They left it at the corner of a certain dewy lane, arched now with July darkness of foliage. There was very little traffic between the high hedges, upon which honeysuckle and the last of the wild roses were flung as they fling beautiful stuffs for a king's procession. The blackbird was singing his last summer song in the dusk of the lane. Ahead where the straight stretch of it came to an end it was filled in with the blue of mountains.

As they came into the lane Creggs stretched out his hand and took Molly's. It was an ideal place for lovers, and he asked nothing better than to walk along it hand in hand with his sweetheart. There was no one to see them, and the evening was exquisite, the sky taking on long placid streaks of green and pale gold like heavenly

lakes and rivers: all the air full of the dew-drenched honeysuckle and meadow-sweet, the new hay about them flooding all other fragrance with its heavy sweets.

But something unresponsive in Molly's hand chilled the lover: something almost of alarm in her face as he leant towards her.

"It is not as lonely as you think," she said, with an embarrassed laugh. "See: here is Molsheen Walsh driving home her cows."

The cows came one by one round the corner of the unsuspected lane that led to a field gate, a little old woman following them.

"Good evening, Molsheen," said Molly. "How are you? And how is Peter? And are the children doing well?"

"All finely, Miss Molly, glory be to God!" answered the old woman, giving a little dip to Lord Creggs. "Himself has a touch of the rheumatics; but sure 'tis lovely weather. And the childher have their holidays from the school. They're out lookin' for the turkeys this evening: they strayed on me. There's a letter from Maggie in America, and *she's* doing well. Och, indeed, there's nothing to complain of."

The old woman went on her way rejoicing, because of the coin Lord Creggs had laid in her work-worn palm for the children.

"You are certainly very remarkable people in this part of the world," he said to Molly as they went on. I am interested in that cousin of yours. And that handsome girl. And old Beecham. And his Dutchman. I don't know where else you'd find as interesting a quartette together."

"Barring the Dutchman you'd find many like them. We're a queer, topsy-turvy people, all mixed up. Vulgarity and refinement side by side in the same families, love of learning in the most unlikely places,

artistic instincts all over the place, romance and the deadliest materialism jostling each other. It is the queerest country on earth. We are only sure of one thing, and that is that we can never be sure of anything."

"You think there are many of their class, like your cousin and Miss . . . Graham, was it?"

"Those Glens up there are full of people like my cousin. They are an austere, simple race. Half Highland Scotch, half Celtic-Irish. You would not find whole country-sides as quietly prosperous elsewhere. There would be drink, for one thing; and politics would distract them; though, mind, when we take political fever here we take it badly. Under Lord Carbery's grandfather all those glens were up in the rebellion."

"Will you take me to see your cousins at home, Molly? Your Aunt Thisbe will not mind when I have talked to her."

"It is not Aunt Thisbe. Perhaps she might consent —now"—Molly spoke with a curious bitterness which mystified the lad by her side. "It is the Sinclairs. They have forbidden me the house."

She broke into an unhappy little laugh at the surprise in his face.

"I went there once. I always wanted to go there My mother was forbidden her home, and she transmitted the heart-hunger to me. They would not let me come again unless I could come openly, and Aunt Thisbe would not permit that."

"They were good to you when you went?"

"Mrs. Sinclair, Hugh's mother, was exquisite. She had been very fond of my mother. I felt, the day I was there, like a child who has strayed and comes home again to the soft bosom of its mother. She cried over me. She called me her love, her dear love. But she would not have me come again—except openly, and with the full approval of my family."

"I shall talk to your aunt," said Creggs, knitting his young brows. "You can't ignore your relations. No; you can't do it. It's a vulgar thing to do. Besides, there's nothing . . . and if there was?"

"I have all sorts of relations of course," said Molly, stealing a tender look at the heated, generous young face. Oh, how fond she could have been of Creggs under other circumstances! "I have cousins who have a public-house in the town of Erris about twenty miles away. I have sometimes thought I should like to know them."

"Why not?" asked Lord Creggs, valiantly. Molly could not be sure that he winced.

"There," she said, "I am only trying you, although it is true all the same. Let the Sinclairs be! They don't want us. Hugh Sinclair and Miss Graham are to be married. We shall not be at Creggs—not very much at Creggs after . . . after September. We might be here half a lifetime and not meet any of the Glens people. I never did until I took up the working life Aunt Thisbe hated so much. Why, a little while ago, I had never seen Hugh Sinclair to know him. Afterwards he . . . he rendered us a service. Aunt Thisbe wouldn't have it talked about. But I will tell you."

She told him the story of the meeting with the steam tram, and he listened quietly.

"Ah," he said, "Mrs. Lambert mentioned something, in a passing way, about your having been alarmed. I had no idea it was so serious as that. It was the first evening we met at Castle Lambert, wasn't it? And so your aunt still thought that a cold ignoring of this kinsman of yours was the right thing?"

His young brows met in a frown.

"I am not going to join in the boycott, Molly," he said. "I shall seek out Hugh Sinclair, and he will have me for a friend. I shall be his friend."

CHAPTER XXI

A SUDDEN RECALL

After that the weeks were uneventful. Lord Carbery and his sister had gone yachting, and so in a natural way the gaieties which had hardly had time to take root at Creggs were dropped for the time. No one wondered openly over Nora and Carbery: all did in their hearts except Lord Creggs, who was quite unconscious of anything to wonder about.

Pen could not keep herself from sending anxious glances at Nora's down-bent golden head as she sat at her embroidery-frame. Nora had not taken kindly to the gardening scheme. She was very busy making a whole set of new covers for the drawing-room chairs in the exquisite tent-stitch which she had acquired by diligent study of an ancestress's sampler. The work absorbed all her thoughts, she said, and accounted perhaps for the pucker in her white brow, and the oddly set mouth which had been so soft and flexible.

Lord Creggs had acted up to his word in bearding Thisbe on the subject of the Sinclairs. He had expected opposition, and was somewhat disappointed at the old lady's way of taking his bomb-shell.

"You think Molly should have opportunities of seeing her cousins?" she said, looking at him over her glasses. "And you think the young man ought to be thanked for the service he rendered my girls that night they drove home from Castle Lambert and met the steam tram? Why, certainly, my dear Creggs. I shall write a polite note to the young man if you wish. And of course Molly, when she is Lady Creggs, will visit whom she pleases."

"You wouldn't ask him here? He would be no discredit to the family. I have seen him and——"

"My dear Creggs, are you wise? I will do just as you wish. But you cannot fuse classes in that way. The young man is an excellent young man, I am told, and does honour to his station in life. Whether he would be altogether at home in Lady Creggs' drawing-room is a matter for your consideration."

Lord Creggs sighed a little impatiently. He had been by way of being a Socialist at Oxford, and had breathed forth his generous soul in Union debates as though generations of young men before him had not done the same thing and died afterwards as crusted country squires or bloated ground landlords.

"Lady Creggs will meet more doubtful people," he said, "not in her own drawing-room, but in other people's. Money carries one anywhere nowadays, or almost anywhere. Still—Creggs Castle is your house. I do not want to insist upon anything."

Thisbe put a hand on his coat-sleeve.

"My dear boy," she said, "my dear boy." There were actually tears in her dim eyes. "If you really wish it you must ask whom you will. After all, it does not really matter—now."

It was a sign of her age that she sometimes spoke her thoughts aloud, and the last sentence was certainly not meant for Lord Creggs' understanding. Still he remembered that Molly had said almost the same thing and for a moment he wondered over it.

"I think I should write and ask him to call," he said seriously. "If you like I will take the note. I don't like accepting a concession made in ever so slight a degree against your will. But I think his kinship should not go unacknowledged, nor the service he rendered Molly and her sisters, even if there were no kinship. It is a case of *noblesse oblige* with us. So I accept."

Thisbe slightly raised her black-silk-covered shoulders

with their fichu of ancient lace; but she forebore to make the shrug too pronounced a one, or to tell her thoughts, which were that, if Lord Creggs went on, it would mean his filling the drawing-room of Creggs Castle with a whole countryside of plain farmers, their wives and daughters, and the publican from Erris and his wife and daughters thrown in. The Head of the Family had already become her dear boy—her dear boy. Sometimes in the periods of pain and weakness, which became more and more frequent, endured in a Spartan silence in her bedroom where no one ventured to invade her once she had closed the door, there were moments when the Head of the Family became confused in her mind with his predecessor; when Time itself became confused, and the present Lord Creggs was the last Lord Creggs, little, toddling on uncertain feet, the small centre and light of the house, the most precious charge of her days and years. It was not likely she could refuse the Head of the Family anything.

Armed with Thisbe's note, Lord Creggs sought out Molly, and told her of the success of his embassy. He expected Molly to be pleased, and he did indeed receive a look from her violet eyes which made his heart beat.

"You dear boy!" she said, echoing her aunt. "But it is no use. I don't believe he will come."

"Not come; why not?"

"We have made a gulf too wide to be crossed," said Molly, shaking her dark head. "And if he came, he would feel only on sufferance. Aunt Thisbe would treat him like a deserving gardener's boy whom she had called in to reward for his diligence by the great honour of her praise. Then it would be worse than ever, and he would never come again, of course."

"You think so?" said Lord Creggs, taken aback.

"I think," said Molly, "that when Aunt Thisbe praised my mother's family for their common sense,

which meant simply their pride, only that she would never ascribe pride to that class, that she was quite right."

"I'm not inclined to give it up, all the same. You will ride with me there, Molly?"

Molly looked down on the ground for a moment. He had an idea she was going to refuse. Then she looked up at him.

"I would rather not go to the Glen Farm," she said. "You know they rejected me. But I will ride with you as far as Ardnaree. And I shall wait for you in the churchyard."

"Why in the churchyard?"

"I shan't be lonely. My mother's people are buried there in great numbers. I shall feel quite at home."

She seemed to have made up her mind that so far she would go and no further. So Lord Creggs, after a protest against the gloominess of her choice, accepted, and they rode off together. The mare, Fatima, which Molly was riding, was Lord Creggs' latest gift to her. It was an Arab, and companionable as a dog. Molly already loved the silken, gentle creature.

They rode easily, as nearly all the way was uphill, and made détours by roads which would save their horses. As they rode through the street of Ballinamona they caught a glimpse on the side path of Mr. Beecham and the tall Dutchman walking together.

"So Mr. Vanderpoot is still in the neighbourhood," said Molly. "I wonder what keeps him here so long? I know he has a big business, and should have thought he could not stay away from it."

"Every one must have a holiday some time," Lord Creggs replied easily. "Probably he has a man to take his place, as I have Darbishire. Not that he is likely to have one as good as Darbishire. I couldn't be

over here all this time if it weren't for him. He has ceased bothering me, good fellow, since he knows how things stand. I had a letter from him this morning. He says the grouse are all over the place; he evidently takes it to heart that I am not there with a few guns. As though grouse could count against you, Molly! I shall ask Sinclair to come shooting with me on the mountain-side. Next week we can have a try at the partridges."

Molly set her lips immovably. She was sure Hugh Sinclair would not go shooting with Lord Creggs. But, like her Aunt Thisbe, she said nothing to depress him.

She rode with him to the very entrance to the Glen. How different it was to-day from the wet March day when she had climbed into it with Hugh Sinclair by her side! Now it lay placid under the late August sun. Pausing in the gap of the mountains, she could see the Sinclairs' white little house with its golden thatches, amid its many golden ricks and dark trees on the hill-side. The Glen was busy apparently, for the hum of the reaping machine was in the air, and Molly could see in the fields the figures of the reapers and binders, men and women, at their work. Half the Glen was golden, with patches of cornfield and stubble; half was green with the after-grass and the late potatoes.

"You will find your man afield," she said, as she turned Fatima in the gap. "But that is the way to the house. You can hardly miss it. I believe you will find him down there in the big field where the reaper is at work. Indeed, I believe he is driving the machine himself, for I think I see a large white creature following after it. That will be his Newfoundland, Bruce."

"Ah, I shall try there, then, so as not to leave you too long in the churchyard. I wish you would wait for me somewhere else."

But Molly had ridden off, smiling back at him over

her shoulder. So he went on down the Glen, one side of which was already in shadow, by reason of the high hills surrounding it, behind which the sun was now beginning his descent into the Atlantic.

Molly went back slowly. She assured herself that she had forgotten her nervous terror of the churchyard that wet day last March when the clouds had lain low, depressing the earth and the spirits of those on it. Even the churchyard would be bright this golden afternoon, and she would kneel by the graves of her mother's father and mother where she had not knelt.

She tied Fatima to a post by the churchyard gate, and went in.

Some one had been keeping the grave of Daniel O'Neill and Mary his wife. The grass indeed had grown over it, but it was not rank and long as most of the grass there was. It had recently been trimmed, and the ivy that climbed to their cross had also been trimmed. Molly thought of it as her cousin's work, and was grateful to him. She thought it must have been because he had found her there. The Glens-people were not very careful of their graves, and were quite willing apparently to let the place return to prairie grass. Even the August sun could not penetrate the damp tangle of the grass which filled the graveyard almost from wall to wall.

She was glad presently to return to Fatima and the open road. The creature was glad to see her, and whinnied her pleasure, thrusting her nose into Molly's hands and pockets, in search of the sugar which was usually forthcoming.

Molly stood smoothing the nose like velvet, and watching the long road for Creggs. He was not long in coming.

"Well?" she asked, as he came near.

"Well," he replied. "You were right, Molly. He

is an obstinate fellow. He wouldn't come; put it on the score of being so busy with his harvest. I felt I couldn't press him. Eh, Molly?"

"No; better let him alone. He is entitled to his dignity," she answered.

She did not know whether she was glad or sorry that Hugh Sinclair would not come. She had wished for the Sinclairs' friendship passionately, it was true; but she must learn to do without it. It was not the same thing, she said to herself, since they had admitted Alison Graham within their borders. There would be always a stranger in that house of dreams in the Glen which Molly remembered so fondly. She was glad she had seen it with only the mother and son there. She wished her cousin nothing but happiness and good luck, and she could not but acknowledge that Alison Graham looked the girl to bring him both; but things would not be the same, they would never be the same again.

She listened with a quiet smile to Lord Creggs' account of the hospitality he had received at the Glen Farm.

"I want to paint the mother," he said. "Sitting there with her lavender ribbons and eyes, and her hands resting in her lap, she was a picture. She spoke fondly of you, Molly, and said she trusted me to make you happy. I said I lived for that, and she seemed satisfied, nodding her head several times. She said she loved you like her own child."

Molly turned away and said nothing.

"I want to paint the house," Creggs went on. "At the back, Molly, there is a little cascade, dropping into a pool where the ducks swim. The water is always running on to the river lower down in the Glen. The windows of the house were open, and the air was full of the brawling of the water. It was as sweet as the singing of birds. What a pleasant place, Molly! I

don't know that I have ever seen a pleasanter. And Sinclair's a fine fellow. Everywhere we went the dog followed us. And the house so spotless and so full of the sun and shadow. And the pleasant smell of the peat everywhere, and the blue mist of it in the golden air."

Molly gazed before her as he talked down the mountain road to where Ballinamona, unseen, smoked in the valley with the reek of many peat fires. The Lough beyond it was dull unbroken silver, and beyond it again mountains, black as a black pansy, tore the low clouds into wisps.

At Creggs a telegram awaited the Head of the Family. Thisbe was sitting in the long drawing-room, keeping watch over it with an anxious face.

"My dear boy," she began, "this came soon after you had gone. I hope there is nothing wrong."

He took it up lightly.

"It is only some trifle," he said; but, reading it, his face became serious.

"Darbishire has been shot by poachers," he said, "in the left lung. He was death on poachers. He would go out with the keepers at night. I had rather they poached all the grouse——"

"Oh, your steward! How very sad!" said Thisbe, taking up her discarded knitting with an air of relief. "But you will be able to get some one to take his place. He will be sure to recover. Those people always do."

Lord Creggs had not heard her apparently. He had his watch in his hand and was thinking hard.

"I'll just be able to do it," he said. "To catch the night mail to Dublin, I mean. With your permission I'll get my portmanteau ready"—Lord Creggs had dispensed with the services of a man since his appearance incognito in those regions—"and give orders for the dog-cart. May I?"

"Is it necessary?" asked Thisbe with a gasp. "My dear boy——"

"They haven't got the bullet out yet. Darbishire asks for me. Of course I must go."

"And the 25th?"

"I shall be back for the 25th. Molly knows I must go."

He turned to Molly, who was standing by the window holding the skirt of her riding-habit in one hand.

"Of course you must go," she said, turning and looking at him. "It is nearly a month to the 25th, but if it was to-morrow I should still say you ought to go."

She winced perceptibly as her lover took her in his arms, and expressed his thanks by his kiss. She felt guilty, because it was really not hard for her to let him go with her wedding-day so near; nor would it have been hard if, as she had said, the wedding-day was to have been to-morrow.

But Greggs apparently had no misgiving.

"I shall be back soon, sweetheart," he said, "and with good news, I trust. As though I should stay away longer than I can help!"

And then the loneliness of the house without a man in the family fell once again upon Creggs Castle.

CHAPTER XXII

GOD-SPEED

Mrs. Lambert had descended upon Creggs with something portentous in her rosy face, which Thisbe observed with a vague apprehension of trouble.

"The girls all out?" she said, as she sank into a seat facing her hostess. "And Pen out too? Well,

on the whole I'm not sorry. I want a chat with you, Thisbe. I've heard a piece of news I wanted to discuss with you. By the way, what about Lord Creggs ? "

Mrs. Lambert had untied her peach-coloured bonnet-strings, and was now taking off her cloak—a sure sign that she was come to make a long visit.

" Let me order tea first," said Thisbe, feebly, as though she could stave off something disagreeable by delay. " And how is Mr. Lambert ? And so your nephew is with you again ? Tea, please, John,"—to the smart young footman who was one of the new glories of Creggs. " What fine weather we have been having ; but I think we are near rain. Oh, Creggs ! Creggs is still nursing that man of his. I should have thought it would not be necessary for him to stay ; but stay he will till the man is out of danger."

" It is quite what I should have expected of him," said Mrs. Lambert, warmly. " And how is Molly getting on without her *fiancé ?* She must miss him very much."

" She keeps out of doors. I rarely see Molly between meals. I dare say she has gone off with a novel somewhere into the woods. I think she misses her little gardening work now that Creggs is away. You know she has given it all up to Oonagh ? Oonagh will do it, though I don't think it agrees with her at all. You know she has that practical young woman, Miss Laffan, assisting her. Poor Oonagh ! I can't imagine her being practical. Of course there is no call for her to be. She tires herself out these hot days."

The young footman was in the room again, setting the tea-table by Thisbe's chair, lighting the spirit lamp under the silver kettle, fetching the hot tea-cakes, and buttered toast and tiny sandwiches which had come in with the new reign of luxury at Creggs. Presently he went away noiselessly, and the intimate conversation was resumed.

"No; Oonagh doesn't look very well," said Mrs. Lambert. "Nor for the matter of that does Molly look her best. It has been an unusually hot summer, and we feel it in these moist latitudes. I suppose it accounts for the black rings under Nora's eyes, and her cough. I heard her cough the other night."

Thisbe made the slightest movement, as though to push off something, and answered with her eyes on her knitting.

"They are all feeling the heat," she said, as though she echoed her friend. Then she looked up with a sudden eagerness. "If Molly feels it," she said, "Molly who was always the strong one, and is the happy one who is to marry Creggs, why should not the others? It is something that will pass. Ah, the kettle is boiling!"

"Let me make tea for you," said Mrs. Lambert, noticing that Thisbe's hand was trembling. She measured the tea from the silver caddy, and poured the hot water on it as though there were nothing portentous in all the world. Mrs. Lambert would keep her solid housewifely virtues although the skies should fall.

"You spoke of news," Thisbe said, watching her fill the cups.

"Jarvis has heard from Miss Aubrey—they correspond oddly enough—that the yachting tour seemed likely to be prolonged indefinitely. They talk of the West Indies——"

She had purposely kept her eyes from her old friend's face, but a sudden cry startled her.

"And what is my child to do? What is my child to do?" Thisbe wailed, all her pride and courage broken down. "Oh yes, Mary Lambert, there is more the matter with Nora than the heat. I thought the man would come back. He looked straight, and I was sure he worshipped the child. What am I to do? How am I to tell her? She is wasting off the face of the earth

as it is. If he meant . . . honestly . . . he would never stay away. I can't write after him nor get Creggs to write after him, to ask his intentions. My girl is gentle. We don't do those things."

Mrs. Lambert put down her cup of tea and, leaning forward, caught Thisbe's hands between her own.

"I wondered if you knew," she said. "Let us keep it from her . . . for the present. I believe in Carbery. There is something at the bottom of it. Is it that girl, I wonder? Yet I liked the minx. There, Thisbe! Be the woman you have always been. Let us keep it from her. If we have time we shall think of something."

Thisbe caught at the hope, slender as it was, in Mrs. Lambert's words.

"Yes; let us keep it from her," she assented eagerly. "With time . . . Creggs will be back. He was Creggs' friend. He could not be that and not be a man of honour. I wasn't mistaken, Mary Lambert. He was head over ears in love with her. I am not one to be always thinking of matches for my girls. But every one must have seen it."

"It was the most obvious thing I ever saw. Yes, I believe in Carbery. Don't fret, Thisbe. If I could get at that girl! Why, I believe in the girl too. Ah!"

Thisbe looked in amazement at Mrs. Lambert's face, over which a sudden elucidation had broken.

"You have thought of something," she said, clutching at her.

"I have thought of something. Don't ask me what it is. There, let me drink my tea. I must be off. Keep up your heart, and do not take too much notice of Nora."

"You will not . . . compromise my girl?"

Mrs. Lambert flushed indignantly.

"What are you thinking of, Thisbe De La Poer?"

"Nothing: nothing," Thisbe answered hastily. "Forgive me, Mary. I know you love the girls."

"Like my own daughters. I wish one of them would marry my boy, Jarvis. But that is past hoping for. I shall have to be content with . . . his choice."

She was tying her bonnet-strings with fingers that fumbled from excess of haste.

"For once the horses and Wilkins will have no cause to complain of waiting," she said. "I'll have an indigestion from bolting your tea-cake, Thisbe. Never mind. I'd do more than that for your family. Now, good-bye, my dear."

She left Thisbe feeling something like renewed hopefulness.

Arrived at Castle Lambert she asked if Mr. Anson had yet returned, and was informed after the Irish fashion that Mr. Lambert was in the library and that Mr. Anson had been in the billiard-room an hour ago or more.

She went straight to the billiard-room without waiting to remove her bonnet, and was relieved as she approached the door to hear the sound of the balls clicking against each other.

"Ah, Jarvis!" she said. "You are just the person I want."

"Sit down, Aunt Mary. You look hot as though you had hurried. What can I do for you?"

"You can put down that cue, and come out on the lawn for a good talk. John may discover us here at any moment."

"Why, I thought Uncle John was entirely in your confidence," Jarvis said, laying down the cue with an imperturbable face.

"Sometimes he isn't till afterwards," Mrs. Lambert replied, and then laughed at her nephew's puzzled face. "Never mind, Jarvis," she said. "It's a way of talking which I've acquired from your uncle. No English person could be expected to understand it."

They established themselves on a seat under the shade of a great chestnut tree, which made an obscurity all around them, while the lawn was flooded with the great golden wave of afternoon sunshine.

"Jarvis," said Mrs. Lambert, suddenly, "are you going to offer me Edith Aubrey for a niece?"

The young man's bronzed face did not change colour.

"Why should you ask me, Aunt Mary?" he said, fumbling in his pocket for his cigarette-case and bringing it out.

"You shouldn't answer one question by asking another, Jarvis," Mrs. Lambert said, almost testily. "That is what they do in this country. It isn't a Yorkshire habit."

"No: I know it isn't. Well, I haven't thought so far ahead, Aunt Mary. Perhaps the young lady wouldn't have me. No man has a right to suppose that a girl would have him before a word or a look of love has passed between them."

"Is it possible?"

"It is . . . just possible."

"Well, then, Jarvis, you needn't bring her to me if Carbery doesn't . . . mend his ways."

Mr. Anson carefully knocked the ash off his cigarette before speaking.

"If Carbery doesn't mend his ways," he repeated, slowly. "That is . . . if he doesn't come back and do what we all expect of him."

"Exactly," said Mrs. Lambert, eagerly. "The girl is . . . is . . . I love those girls like my own children."

"I know, Aunt Mary. You need say no more. There is no necessity for dotting all the 'i's,' is there? As a matter of fact, I hope Carbery won't go to the West Indies."

"You hope it? You have a ground for hoping it?"

"I thought I would run down to Youghal. There isn't much fun in knocking over partridges quite by one's self. After a week in the South, Creggs would probably be back. Carbery too, perhaps."

"Youghal! The *Seamew* is lying in Youghal Harbour?"

"She is to lie there for four days. She will not have sailed to-morrow. I had been waiting to see you, to tell you that I was off for a few days.'

"Oh, go, go! Your uncle and I are not the liveliest company."

"I have not asked better for a great many years."

"Go, with my blessing! And if you bring me back Edith Aubrey, I shall receive her with open arms."

"I am to bring her brother too, I suppose?"

"You are to bring Carbery, if he is going to act like a man of honour."

"And a man in love."

"You know he was that, Jarvis?"

"Could any one doubt it?"

"Why, then, his inexplicable behaviour?"

"Perhaps he thought the new love could wait till he was off with the old?"

"He is a fool, then. The new love is slipping through his fingers as hard as ever she can. If ever I saw a girl making for a decline."

"Carbery will come back."

Mrs. Lambert looked at her nephew with sudden misgiving.

"You're not doing anything quixotic, Jarvis? Forgive me, but a little while ago you were in love with Molly."

Mr. Anson winced ever so slightly.

"It's a poor compliment to Miss Aubrey to suppose such a thing," he answered. "I'm not a great poetry reader, Aunt Mary, but I know—

"'If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?'

and I also know,

"'If she love me, this believe,
I will die ere she shall grieve.'"

He put back his cigarette-case into his pocket.

"I shall start to-morrow morning, Aunt Mary," he said.

Mrs. Lambert leant across impulsively, and hugged her nephew.

"God speed you, Jarvis," she said. "I believe in Edith Aubrey, although she has been at the root of the mischief, I am sure. Bring her to me, and I shall try in time to love her as well as Molly."

Again the almost imperceptible shrinking passed over the young man's calm face.

"You must love her without comparison with others," he said, standing up as though the interview were at an end. "I shall just stroll down to the post-office and send a wire to Carbery to say I am coming. That will insure my finding the *Seamew*. And I've to tell Jennings that I want my bag packed for a few days. Jennings doesn't like to have things rushed upon him."

"God speed, my dear lad!" said Mrs. Lambert again.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE EARL OF CORK'S CHAPELRY

It was a mild autumn afternoon at Youghal, with a watery sun, and many loose grey clouds floating upon the grey, which the weather-wise took as portending dirty weather.

The woman who sells the pitchers of red clay by the kerb in the Main Street said as much to Miss Aubrey with friendly concern. Miss Aubrey had been an excellent customer of hers, had purchased nearly all her stock in fact, and had made no demur when told that the largest pitchers, which stood about two feet high, could not be sold for less than sixpence.

"I'd be laying by that boat o' yours for the winter," said Ellen Moriarty, "an' gettin' home be train whin go yez must. There's goin' to be teems o' rain an' clappin' o' wind on top of it. Yez'd be more comfortable at the Green Park Hotel thin rowlin' about on them Atlantic waves."

Miss Aubrey looked at the sky, then at the glimpse of greenish sea caught between the house-fronts.

"It doesn't look pleasant," she said. "But we are in harbour for a few days waiting for a friend. I dare say the weather will be fine enough before we need put out."

"The weather doesn't take up aisy once it breaks in the first week of September. The winter is very apt to set in then."

"We shall be far enough away from your winter, Ellen. We are going after the summer."

"May yez always find it wherever yez are!" said the woman, devoutly. "Still I'd be careful about lavin' the harbour, honey. 'Twill be some time before yez can overtake the summer."

"I'll tell my brother what you say. He's the skipper, you know."

She went on down the old-fashioned street, under the Clock Tower, hardly conscious of the haunting memories of that most haunted little town. She had a flush of pleasure in seeing a window scarlet and yellow with the tomatoes which Sir Walter Raleigh was the first to plant, as Mr. Beecham had remembered. Again, a child came

towards her obscured for a moment by the arch of a tower, shapely against the sky beyond as she tilted a red water-pitcher on her dark, wild little head, with Eastern grace. It made Miss Aubrey's eyes a little brighter: her artistic instincts were strong and sound.

The summer visitors had fled away from Youghal before the first breath of the early winter. They did not often, indeed, invade the ghostly old town, but kept to the strip of sands and the red brick houses about the railway station. Yet was this a summer visitor who was coming to meet her, along the dark Mall where the trees already were rustling in yellow? This well-groomed, gray-clad person with a rose in his coat, who was already smiling his recognition at her? To her discomfiture—she was the least sentimental of beings—she felt herself colouring a little as they advanced towards each other. To be sure he was colouring too, but that she was too confused to see. She could hardly make a pretence even of her usual air of *insouciance*, although she thrust her hands deeper in her pockets and gave an extra little swagger to her gait in order to cover the shy pleasure which had been one of the causes of her blush.

"Why, how lucky I am!" he said as he came up to her, and, taking her hand, stood over her, looking down at her boyishly curled head with the yachting cap set rakishly on its gold.

"We didn't expect you for some hours yet," she said. "I am very glad you could come."

"And I was very glad to come. No: I didn't hope to be here so early. It is a troublesome cross-country journey. I found an excursion train waiting at Mallow which brought me along in capital style."

"And now you are here—are you coming with us?" she asked, looking up at him with a glance which rather to his surprise made his heart beat.

Jarvis Anson had looked upon himself as a faithful person, and was not altogether pleased that the wound inflicted by Molly should take so short a time in healing.

"We shall talk over that," he answered. "I suppose Carbery is on board?"

"As a matter of fact there is no one on board except one sailor. Carbery has gone rowing up the Blackwater. You see, we didn't expect you——"

"Why didn't you go with him?"

She answered him steadily, although her eyes fell a little before his.

"We were uncertain, you see, of the hour of your arrival. We thought—Val thought—that it wouldn't do for you to find an empty house. Now, are you hungry?"

"I lunched at Mallow."

"I can give you tea on board."

"I don't long for tea just yet. It is only three o'clock. Show me some of the sights."

They climbed up the hill to St. Mary's Church and the College. The purple valerian hung in clusters on the College walls. Between the trees of Myrtle Grove they could see the oriel of Raleigh's study, and the twisted yews in his garden.

In playing cicerone Miss Aubrey made an effort after her old sparkle. As they went round the tombs in dark St. Mary's Church she even gave him information which was positively misleading.

"You forget," he reminded her, "that you promised never to play tricks on me any more."

"So I did," she said with a humility that became her. Jarvis noticed, not for the first time, the golden brown of her curling lashes that veiled now the frankness of her wide-open childish eyes. "I am glad you reminded me."

"That you are not to treat me like a Cook's tourist."

"I never thought of treating you like a Cook's tourist," she said with a little air of horror. "Besides, they never come here. This town of dreams and ghosts would have no attraction for them. So this is your first visit to Youghal? This is the chapelry of the Earl of Cork—a stupendous monument to human vanity."

They stood within the little chapel. The shortening afternoon had already filled the church with shadows. The fierce, painted eyes of the great Earl stared at them from his effigy where he stands amid his family. Beside them were the tombs of the Knights Templars with their crossed legs to show they had been Crusaders.

"The place makes me afraid," she said, with a little shudder.

He looked at her with the man's tenderness for a woman's fears.

"Not with me," he said, coming a pace nearer.

There was not a soul in the great church but themselves. The silence could almost be felt. They stood so an instant—he looking down at her, she with eyes averted towards the feet of the Templars.

"I want you," he said with great deliberation, "to give up the West Indies and come back with me."

"To Athclea? Winter is somewhat dull there, despite the hunting. Neighbours are so far apart. You must talk to Val."

"Do you know," he said, in his slow way, "I don't believe it was your brother's idea at all. He would not find Athclea dull even if there were no hunting."

"Whose, then?" she flashed at him, a little resentful.

"Yours, Miss Aubrey."

"And why—why——"

He suddenly took her two hands in his.

"You may as well confess," he said. "You have

been listening to your bad angel. You have been trying to separate your brother and the girl he loves."

"Not that," she answered vehemently. The colour was ebbing and flowing in her cheeks. "Not that. But I wanted Val to myself for a little while. I gave five years up to dreaming of the day I should come back to him and be all in all to him. Could he not give me just three months? Indeed I earned it. Afterwards—I wouldn't have lifted a finger to prevent his marriage if I could. I know his heart is in her, not in me. Why should I not have just those three months?"

"We cannot fix our own times," he said, almost sadly. "In three months' time from now, if you go to the West Indies, I greatly fear your brother's happiness will be beyond his grasp."

"What do you mean?" She stared at him with frightened eyes.

"I mean—you never meant it, Edith—that the girl . . . Can't you see her side of it? Your brother singled her out, made her conspicuous, then left her without a word. To her it is like a disgrace. They have been brought up in that delicate, unreal atmosphere. She is not strong. She looks like a ghost. In three months' time she will be beyond saving."

Miss Aubrey had turned very pale.

"I never meant it," she said. "We shall go back at once. Poor Val! he has been doing it for me. He has been miserable, poor boy. You think she will grow strong again?"

"I think she only needs happiness."

"Ah, well!"—her old sparkle came back for a moment—"I shall dance at her wedding. I shall dress the bride. You will see that I won't do things by halves. I never was one to do things by halves, bad or good. You will see I shall speed them."

"Will you look on at their happiness—afterwards?"

She made a wry little mouth.

"I should be afraid of myself. I might break down. As for going back to Aunt St. John, I don't think I shall do it. You can't imagine what a set-to we had! Poor aunt! I think she is fond of me in her way, odd as it may seem. She could not endure my leaving her after all those years for Val, whom she looked upon as just a mischievous boy. But I can't eat humble pie, and she would expect it. I think I shall look for a—a travelling companionship."

"Why not be a lady cook?"

"Because I can't cook. What a joke it would be!" —a twinkle came into her eye as with a child who is going to play a prank. "I might become a gardener like Molly. Val would give me acres of land if I only breathed the word. But I think I shall want to . . . get out of this after the wedding. I might be horrid. I can't depend on myself. Do you know any one who wants a travelling companion?"

"I do, I think. The question is whether you would accept the situation."

"You think it too hard?" she said eagerly. "Some grumpy old lady, or a spoilt heiress? You don't know me at all. I can be awfully patient and forbearing where my jealousy is not aroused. I am only horrid about Val. And my spirits—at ordinary times—are unflagging."

Jarvis noticed, as he noticed once before, that there was a wistfulness about the small face which had not been there when he had first seen Miss Aubrey. He remembered that when he had caught sight of her, a little while before coming along the gray street, her face had been sad before it had lighted up at sight of him.

"Do you think," he asked humbly, "that you could ever feel towards me as you do towards your brother?"

"Towards Val?" she said promptly. "No; I am sure I couldn't."

"Well, then, could you be awfully patient and forbearing with me? Could you preserve unflagging high spirits with so dull a fellow? Could you—in fact—I thought of wintering abroad—be my travelling companion?"

He drew her towards him by the hands which he was still holding. She looked up at him half-frightened, half arch.

"Is it——?" she began, yielding to him.

"A proposal? It is, darling. I shall be very exacting to my travelling companion, I warn you."

Then he laid his face against hers.

Presently she looked up at him.

"It isn't because you pity me, Jarvis?"

"It is because I pity myself. What an actor I should be if I were really playing Don Quixote!"

He smiled to himself with a remembrance of his aunt's alarm on the same score.

"There is no one . . . you would like better?"

"No one," he said, taking her face in his hands, and looking down into her eyes. "You will never need to be jealous of me. You will always be first."

She sighed contentedly. Of course she had known that he was supposed to be in love with Molly De La Poer. But his eyes were truth itself. Whatever he had felt in the past, it was certain that she was first now. In her way she was a great-minded girl, and she put the thought of his having cared for Molly De La Poer out of her mind for ever.

The shadows had gathered more deeply around them. Suddenly she started, and drew herself out of his embrace.

"We must go," she said, "or we shall be locked in. How ghostly it is! And to think that this has happened in a church! I wonder if it is very wicked?"

"In the chapelry of the Earl of Cork," he smiled. "Nothing could be more of this world. Yet the Templars bring their sense of benediction."

With a sudden impulse she took the violets she was wearing in her bosom and laid them on the crossed feet of one warrior. Her lover followed her with his rose.

As they passed out together hand in hand the painted eyes of the great Earl seemed to glare more fiercely than ever through the shadows.

A boat lay waiting for them at the Quay. They put off to the yacht, which was not very far from the shore, and as they approached they saw Lord Carbery's face leaning over the side.

"Hello, Anson!" he called cheerily. "I'm very glad to see you. What news of every one? Hurry up, Edie! I'm famished for my tea."

It was lighter here than it had been in the church, full of shadows and surrounded by great trees. When Miss Aubrey had left them, and the two men had descended and refreshed themselves, they came on deck again. Leaning over the bows together they looked down at the green water. Watching his companion's face sideways, Jarvis Anson asked himself what the sister had been about not to see how haggard her brother's face had grown. Lord Carbery's rugged irregular features lent themselves to melancholy.

"Brought your luggage, Anson?" asked Lord Carbery.

"A small bag. It came over in the boat."

"That thing! You're going to Santa Cruz with us, or else why did you turn up?"

"To take you back with me."

"Oh, by Jove, I wish you could. I'm not much on for this trip. We've been afloat six weeks already, and I'm losing all the shooting, and shall miss the hunting. But Edie has set her heart on it. We'll be home by

Christmas if we have to come home by mail steamer. I can't refuse Edie her will. As a matter of fact, I've disappointed Edie horribly."

Jarvis didn't encourage the confidence that was coming. He was not one to talk over things much. They were going home at once, and let Carbery discover for himself the mischief he had been doing.

"As a matter of fact," he said, biting the end off a cigar, "Miss Aubrey is not going with you. She has . . . in fact . . . given me a right to take an interest in her future doings. And I think . . . Aunt Mary would expect the wedding to take place in this country. I'm bound to please her as she has been so good to me."

"My dear fellow," said Lord Carbery, who had been listening open-mouthed. "My dear fellow, I'm delighted, I'm sure. I can trust you with Edie's happiness. And—there's plenty of wind. We'll turn the yacht about and get home as fast as we can."

Indeed, before the party had sat down to the extremely abundant tea which the appetite of a seaman, even a lovelorn one, required, there was an unusual bustle on the deck of the *Seamew*. And presently they were under canvas, and sailing before the south-west wind. Carbery, rubbing his hands cheerfully together, predicted that they would be home before the dirty weather; and indeed it seemed likely enough, for the yacht took the water like the bird she was called from.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WARNING

The storm which the *Seamew* had meant to outrace broke over Creggs in torrents of rain, with high wind. It was not likely to be fine for days. In those Western

latitudes they might even look for weeks of rain. All the gardening operations were suspended. The asters in the garden of the castle were beaten flat to earth. The tomatoes in pots, which were to have been Molly's pride, were sadly knocked about. Only the violets crept under their leaves and were safe.

The high rooms of the castle were gloomy those days with dark shadows creeping up the walls, and the fires, however one heaped them, only making a little oasis of light and warmth in the oceans of parqueted floors and high ceilings.

Oonagh had come back to the chimney corner and sat there with a book in her lap, seldom turning the pages. She seemed content to resume her old indoor habits. Perhaps it was too late for her to change radically; and Molly had a sense of half mirthful, half sorrowful indignation at her successor's lack of interest in the work. Only for Eily Laffan it would have come to an end altogether.

Nora was no better than her sister. The two girls had always been so little robust that it seemed a natural thing for them to creep indoors from the drenched world outside. Neither had any desire to be stirring. Even Molly's approaching marriage did not seem to interest them greatly, though they made efforts, being tender and kind as they were, to grow excited over Molly's trousseau and the garments they were to wear as bridesmaids.

"Things will be all right," said Thisbe, uneasily, "when Creggs comes back. There is nothing like a man in the house for cheerfulness, and once one has become used to a man it is worse to go without. I think it is too bad for that man of his to have the shot so scattered about in him. And in his lungs too! It is the perversity of his class that he couldn't have received it, if receive it he must, in a less dangerous place."

"I dare say he will be soon out of danger," said Molly, with a cheerfulness she was far from feeling. In her heart she reflected that she would not have been altogether ill-pleased if the dangerous state of the wounded man were prolonged enough to give her a respite from her wedding-day. Of course he should get well after all. But oh, to postpone the dreaded 25th! Molly had moments when she felt that she must cry out before them all that she could not, would not marry Creggs. It was by incessant walking in the rain and the wind that she kept herself from any such hysterical outburst. She would come in from her walks tired enough to have her sensations blunted; but, alas! by the time she laid her head on her pillow, she was wide awake again.

The wind buffeting her cheeks, the rains washing them, kept her face as fresh as a flower. Only her eyes were tired when she was off guard. When she allowed the lines of her face to relax, there was a suggestion of exhaustion about it. One evening in particular it struck Thisbe that Molly was overdoing it.

She gave no account of whither she went during her walks. Having asserted her independence, she had gained it finally: and indeed Thisbe would have been the last to suppose that her niece used her liberty for any purpose she could have disapproved of. Once she had been persuaded that ladies did these things—the Head of the Family had been the one to reconcile her—she sought to place no limits.

That day Molly had encountered Miss Graham and Mr. Vanderpoot at Mr. Beecham's. She had drunk the delightfully fragrant tea—a guinea a pound—which the florist kept for the use of his honoured guests, but had fled as soon as might be at the information that Hugh Sinclair was expected to join the party.

For a little while the two girls had been left together.

At first there was a strangeness between them. Then on a sudden impulse—the impulse of women to press the thorn into their bosoms—Molly went over to Alison Graham and took her hand.

"I wish to congratulate you," she said.

Miss Graham's soft handsome face became rosily radiant.

"Thank you," she said. "I hope I may be permitted to congratulate you!"

For a second Molly wondered what she was to be congratulated about. Then remembered Creggs, and answered as she was expected to.

They stood holding each other's hands. Molly looked at the other girl with half-envious admiration. She was a good deal older than Molly, and her figure had the lines of womanhood—soft, gracious, flowing lines which suggested the woman beneath, and not the horrible compression and fulness of the corset as one so often sees it in smartly dressed women.

"I hope you will be very happy," said Molly, and, leaning over, kissed Alison Graham on the cheek. In a few years to come, or with less health, it was conceivable that Miss Graham's cheekbones might be too high, her face a little too harsh in outline, but now the contour of youth and its rose and white veiled all such suggestions.

She blushed with pleasure at Molly's kiss.

"I am sure to be happy," she answered with a high, joyous ring in her voice. "And, I think, I think you are sure to be happy too."

Molly smoothed her hand wistfully with her own disengaged one. She could hardly tell what impulse it was that caused her to caress the girl whom she knew in her heart of hearts to be hurting her. But she had the impulse—perhaps it is not an uncommon one with women—to be tender to the woman who has been preferred before

her, finding so an anodyne to her own wound. Beyond that, she felt that she belonged more to this girl and her class than to those with whom presently her life would be spent. But that was all over and done with. She was to belong to her husband's class henceforth, and must remember only her father's part in her, never at all her mother's.

Mrs. Lambert did not come near them during the week of deluge. Thisbe commented on her absence almost angrily to Molly.

"She need not get a drop of rain," she said, "from doorstep to doorstep. What if her fat Wilkins and her fat horses get wet? What then? It would do them good for once in a way,."

"Why not go to her?" asked Molly. "She might say precisely the same of you." A brougham had recently been added to the comforts of the Creggs ladies by the same beneficent kindness which had done so much for them.

"Not I," said Thisbe, with a toss of her head. "If she thinks I am going after her! She's an alarmist—that's what she is—and undertakes more than she can do."

Molly said nothing. That would be a strange day in which Thisbe had not a flout for Mrs. Lambert, although in her heart of hearts she had both confidence in and affection for her.

"She thought your sisters were looking ill," went on Thisbe, with an effort after indifference. "She ought to know as well as we do that without being exactly robust they have constitutions. Dr. Randal always said they had. I am sure Nora looks better than she did a week ago. Girls are not like flowers to wither if a cold blast touches them. And if Oonagh is quiet it means nothing. No one could say there was anything wrong with Oonagh. Why should there be more the matter with Nora?"

"Why indeed? It is not easy to be exuberantly cheerful in such weather."

"I dislike people who promise more than they can fulfil," went on Thisbe, enigmatically. "For that matter, Molly, I wish you'd take more care of yourself. Creggs won't be over-well pleased if he finds you looking tired and washed out."

"As though I ever should," said Molly, who indeed had never suffered from the ills that girlhood is heir to.

There were times when Thisbe was positively angry with her elder girls.

"We always had good health," she said. "Your father never knew what it was to ail. And your mother, though she looked delicate, could do more than many a strong person. Why should ye be different?"

And then the two girls would come out of their languor to protest vehemently that they were as well as possible, but almost immediately afterwards would subside as though the effort had been too much for them.

The morning after Molly's conversation with her aunt, while she dressed, the other aunt came into the room. She looked scared and harassed.

"What is the matter, Aunt Pen?" asked Molly, with that impatience her Aunt Thisbe had shown, which is so often the very expression of fear and love. "You don't look well. Are we going to have a household of sick women with only Aunt Thisbe and myself to nurse?"

Pen went and closed the door of the room. Then she came to Molly's side, her teeth chattering a little as though with cold.

"I heard the banshee last night," she said. "Which of us is it to be? Molly, if it might be only me!"

Molly turned a scared face to her.

"The banshee! You dreamt it. Besides, there is no such thing."

"No such thing!" Miss Pen's fright seemed to have been momentarily forgotten in her resentment. "You, a De La Poer, to say such a thing! Why, none of us ever died without a banshee's warning. It would be quite unworthy an ancient family like ours. It has always been heard when one of us was going to die. Didn't Peggy Grady hear it before the bog-slide when your dear father was as well and hale as any one? What next, I should like to know, Molly?"

"There were so many signs and omens the time of the bog-slide," said Molly. "And old Peggy is full of stories. Anyhow, Aunt Pen, whether you heard the banshee or not, we'd better keep it to ourselves lest we frighten Aunt Thisbe out of her life. I wouldn't answer for her life if you were to tell her that story, Aunt Pen. Though she is so brave, her heart won't stand any strain. I am ashamed of you for a Christian woman believing in banshees and such things!"

Pen's teeth ceased to chatter.

"Indeed, Molly," she said with some gentle indignation, "it is quite possible to be a Christian woman and yet to believe in banshees and other appearances. Why, if we gave up our banshee it would be the first step towards making the De La Poers like quite common people. I know your ideas are often very odd, but I hope they don't go as far as that, Molly. Even Creggs, and he's advanced enough—didn't I hear him justify the French Revolution one day?—would hardly say or wish it to be said that there was no banshee in the family."

Molly was glad to have diverted the old lady's thoughts.

"I'll believe in the banshee if you like, Aunt Pen," she said desperately: in her heart of hearts she was not sure at all that she did not believe; "but I will not believe that you have heard it now; and you'll say

nothing of it to Aunt Thisbe unless you want to kill her."

"As though I should say anything to Thisbe," said Pen in an aggrieved way. "I think you might give me credit for more common sense than that, even if I am your great-aunt."

"And if I were you I should sleep with cotton-wool in my ears," went on Molly. "I'll find out who has been playing the banshee. Probably one of the maids with a nightmare."

She broke off to smile, despite her unhappiness, at Pen's shocked face. But she had averted the thing she feared. Pen, although she looked a bit shaky all day, said nothing of her experience, but she could hardly look Molly's way without sending her a reproachful glance.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WIND AND THE RAIN

Mrs. Lambert had come in a hole-and-corner fashion, quite unlike her usual brisk, cheery way of coming into a room, like a high, warm wind. In fact, a message had been brought to Thisbe sitting among her flock—all but Molly, who was as usual out-of-doors—that Mrs. Lambert wished to see her, and awaited her in the library.

Thisbe did not wonder as the others did. Muttering something about business matters, she stood up and went out of the room.

"Well, Mary Lambert," she said, as she entered the library, "so you have come at last?"

Then something in the other's face struck her dumb. The rosy tints of it were faded, the eyes looked as though they ached for tears.

"I would have come before, Thisbe," she said, in a

dull way, "if there had been any good news, any good news at all. My boy Jarvis promised to help me, to help us. You could always depend on Jarvis's kindness and good sense. He left Friday last to join Lord Carbery and his sister at Youghal, where the *Seamew* had put in. We have only just ascertained that the same night the *Seamew* left Youghal with the intention of returning home. The storm broke a few hours later. There is no news of the yacht."

"Friday. To-day is Thursday. With the wind from the south-west, they should have been home in two and a half days."

"The coast is rockbound all the way, a wild coast. Driven upon its cliffs, what chance would the *Seamew* have?"

"She has put in somewhere for shelter."

"There is no word of her at any of the harbours. John has been wiring all over the country."

"If anything had happened, there would be news," said Thisbe, with a white face; "there would be wreckage. A yacht like the *Seamew* does not disappear without leaving a trace."

"We should not know yet. There is a hundred miles of coast. They may be disabled far out to sea, at the mercy of the winds we have had of late. It is the one chance—a poor chance."

"What are we to do?"

The two women looked at each other blankly.

"If Jarvis is dead, it was I who sent him," said Mrs. Lambert at last.

"And they had turned about to come home? That meant——"

"It meant that Carbery was coming back to Nora."

"My poor child!"

"My poor lad!"

They stood there amid the mouldering magnificence

of the books in their gilt and tooled bindings. The wet masses of greenery flapped forlornly against the windows. A wind sprang up and shrieked through the keyholes, and rattled all the warped and ill-fitting doors and windows. It was early afternoon, yet one could not have seen to read in the room, so low and heavy trailed the clouds.

"Where is Molly?" asked Mrs. Lambert, suddenly. "We must not tell the others—yet. We could trust Molly. She is the girl to stand up under a blow. She would help you, Thisbe."

"I never know where Molly is. Even she is not the same. There is not the old confidence. I wish Creggs would come back and make us happy again."

"I must not see them, or my face would betray me. Can you do it, Thisbe?"

"I am a sick old woman. If my spirit fails, they will lay it to the score of my body. I have never been the same since Simon died. It struck at my heart."

Where was Molly then? Molly had ridden to Ballinamona, and had put up Fatima at the Creggs Arms. Great was Mrs. Sweeney's concern at the drenched condition of her darling. It was market-day in Ballinamona, and the inn was full, but she left all her customers to attend to Molly in the little private parlour which was kept for the use of very particular guests.

"My habit is waterproof," Molly assured her, as she stood wringing out the long coils of her hair by the fire, while Mrs. Sweeney stood with hot towels ready to finish the drying; "and my hair is only wet in the twists of it. My feet are quite dry. My habit covered them. Presently, when you have refreshed me, I am going out again."

Mrs. Sweeney protested with upraised hands and eyes; but even while she spoke a glint of watery sun came from between the clouds.

"Sure, maybe 'tis goin' to take up, plase God," said the good woman, "and thin I won't say a word to ye. 'Tis a great thing about the climate, glory be to God, that though 'tis powerful wet, yet there's great hope in it. You can nearly always count on dreeps of rain, but sure whin 'tis at the worst 'tis breakin' up it'll be, an' a grand evenin'."

The watery glint continued coming and going while Molly had her meal. As soon as she had finished she took her habit over her arm and went up the hilly street towards the mountains.

The market was over by this time, but a good many sellers and buyers yet remained in the town, toasting their bargains in glasses of whiskey, and in a state of excellent goodfellowship with each other which had not yet come to be quarrelsome. The greater number of the cattle and sheep went down the hill towards the light-railway station. As Molly ascended she overtook now a girl driving a flock of geese, again an old man with a couple of calves or a creel full of pigs all grunting and squeaking vociferously.

In Ardnaree she found the church where her mother had prayed and been married, open to the wind and weather and went in. A swallow, dismayed from his flight southward by the storms, was circling about in the high, barn-like roof. Now and again he caught a glint of the sun on his wings, and was a golden bird till he swept within the shadows again.

A couple of peasants were praying near the altar, pressing close to it with an ardour which was the very realization of faith. She passed them by and went up to the gallery, where she was in the obscurity of the roof, and, laying her cheek down on the wooden bench which had been worn smooth by the arms of generations of her people, she rested a little while. She had not learnt to pray as her mother prayed, but the peace of prayer,

although she said nothing, seemed to descend upon her and wrap her about in visible comfort.

Just this once, once more she would visit the graveyard, and perhaps go a little further and stand at the entrance of the Glen, and then go back down the mountain-side as quickly as ever she could, so that she might be home in time for tea ; for how to explain her absence for so many hours she hardly knew.

As she entered the graveyard the rain began again, and the clouds brooded once more upon the earth and hid the mountains in wet mist.

The long grass of the graveyard was like a river. The grey grasses lay face downward in wet swathes, and the many trees dripped, every leaf of them. The trees here were yet green and dark, as though autumn came late to the trees of the graveyard. The high walls were covered with moss dank with rain. Every cross and every funeral urn dripped with the trees. The paths, worn into many holes, held miniature lakes and ponds. So saturated was everything that even Molly's stout shoes felt damp and uncomfortable.

At last she stood by the grave of her people, and saw that the pansies were yet in flower, and mignonette not quite over.

She stooped down and plucked a weed or two that had grown tall and rank amid the flowers. As she stood up again, there was a quiet voice close to her, and the rush of a large wet body against her. Indeed, before she could stand quite upright, Bruce had licked her cheeks.

"The weeds flourish in this weather," said Hugh Sinclair. "It was only last Saturday that it was all made clean and straight."

She held out a wet hand to him and he took it. Her other hand she laid caressingly on the great black and white head of the dog.

"You do this?" she asked, indicating the grave.

"When first I saw it, it was forgotten and neglected."

"It is nothing," he replied. "We are too careless about such things. The pansies will be in flower pretty well through the winter. But why are you here in the rain? You are getting drenched."

"And you too."

He looked down at his homespuns and brown leggings.

"I shall take no harm," he said. "Do you know I have followed you? I saw you in Ballinamona. I was at the fair. I waited for you outside the chapel, and followed you on here."

"Why?" she asked in wonder.

"Why should I not? I thought you might be coming to see my mother, openly, with consent if not with approval. But you must not stay here. You will have rheumatism and all sorts of things. Shall I carry you off to the Glen Farm for my mother to make warm and dry before you go home? Shall I?"

Molly shook her head. If only she might have gone, and laid her head in the soft mother-lap of the woman of her kin whom her mother had loved! Surely that mother had longed for her own people and the Glen Farm before Molly was born, and that was why the girl was heart-hungry for them. But she was going to place barriers between herself and her own people. They were so much to her that they must be all or nothing. Once she was Lady Creggs, with the world to choose from as to where she would be and live, she would forget the blue mountains and the smell of the peat, and the way the green light fell in the clean shadowy little house, and the eyes and voice of her cousin.

"I'm afraid I cannot come," she said. "I have been out so long. My aunt will be worried about my absence, and she has had so much to bear—it is only her

spirit keeps her going—I think her heart is nearly worn out. When it stops beating, she will have earned her rest. She has been indomitable for all of us."

She was defending her aunt against an accusation which had not been spoken, which indeed she had been the first to make—the accusation of cruelty to her mother. She was also buttressing her own resolution that her marriage must go on, no matter how she shrank from it. She did shrink more and more from it as the time came near—thought indeed, at moments, that she could be a happy woman for just being free.

She had had a whimsical notion of how good a thing it would be if she could run away from her marriage—without hurting any one, if only that could be, and taking Eily Laffan with her, and going to be trained at a gardening college she had heard of somewhere, and then getting a plot of land in Scilly and growing narcissi and daffodils, tulips and hyacinths. Why, that would be happiness enough. Who could be anything but happy, growing flowers?

If only so many people's happiness did not depend on her marrying Creggs! Dear Creggs, it was a shame that he had chosen a woman who did not want to marry him. He deserved better things.

"My mother would like to see you again," Hugh Sinclair said wistfully, as he watched her downcast face. "She has not wished you happiness. Did I tell you how much attracted she was by Lord Creggs? She was very glad—I am very glad—that he is to have charge of your happiness. You will forgive your nearest kinsman saying so?"

"Why, surely," said Molly. "You have the right to say so much. He is a dear fellow. Every one loves him. He sheds brightness wherever he goes. He is the most unselfish, the most simple——"

"I know," said Hugh Sinclair quietly. "His

qualities are in his face. So you will not come and take shelter as you did that day? Then I must send you home. Lord Creggs would not thank me if you were laid up with a chill for your wedding-day. I think, if he knew, he would tell you to come to my mother, and get dry garments. Your aunt would hardly object even."

"Ah, but it is impossible. It would be dark before I should reach home. Give your mother my dear love, and tell her I wished to come. And will you let me wish you every happiness?"

Hugh Sinclair stared.

"Why should you wish me happiness?" he asked.

"On . . . on . . . your engagement. You are engaged, are you not, to Miss Graham? Mr. Beecham told me."

"Beecham is a prating old fool," said Hugh Sinclair, with sudden roughness. "I am not going to marry anybody. He always destined Alison and myself for each other, because we were firm friends from childhood, and had common tastes. When did he tell you this story?"

"Some months ago. In June, I think."

"About the time you became engaged to Lord Creggs?"

"About that time."

"And you believed him? If he had not told you that . . . I could not have aspired to Miss De La Poer, but you were my own cousin. A man does not think of things when he falls in love with a woman at first sight. My mother loved you. You were the only woman on earth who ever touched my heart. Could you have been happy in the Glen, the wife of a mountain farmer—you, the Honourable Miss De La Poer? I thought that day in March that you could. It was my pride, my pride and my mother's conscience came

between. Partly too it was my honour of you. I wanted you to avow to your world that you were not ashamed of your mother's people. Stranger things have happened, where the gentry are so poor,—Creggs Castle was in rags and tatters—than that a lady should stoop to an honest plain man who loved her. Perhaps you would have scorned me if you had known what was in my mind, but I did not think you would."

While this speech poured from his lips in an irresistible flood, Molly had been putting out her hands as though in a helpless appeal for silence; but at the last words her expression changed, and she looked at him with shining eyes.

"I would never have scorned you," she said. "Never talk of scorn."

"I would have made you love me."

"You must not say that to me now," said Molly steadily; yet the colour was high in her cheeks, and her eyes were bright. She held her purple-black head a little higher.

"I shall always love my mother's people," she said. "I wanted to love Miss Graham for your sake. I made friends with her. She is a charming girl. Do you know I saw her receive a large paper-covered box at the railway station the other day, and I thought by her eyes it held her wedding-dress? How mistaken I was!"

She did not say that she had turned away to avoid Alison Graham that day. Her thoughts must have been on wedding-garments because she too had driven to the station to receive some fine things of her trousseau sent down from a Dublin shop.

"You were not so much mistaken," he said gloomily. "She is to marry Vanderpoot. She will be a bride before you are."

"I have been a dullard," said Molly.

With a sudden impulse she stooped down and gathered a few pansies from the grave.

"You will give me one?" he asked.

She extended it to him without a word, and he took it.

"You must forgive me," he said, and the excitement had gone from his face. "I have been saying things to you I ought not to have said. But you will forget them. There is no likelihood we shall meet again."

"Perhaps not," said Molly.

At the moment she did not greatly care. It was enough for the moment to know that the home in the Glen was given back to its old place in her dreams, enough that Hugh Sinclair loved her. Afterwards, there would be other things to think about. But then it would be too late to have any regrets. She could not break Lord Creggs's heart. She could not tell her aunt Thisbe that she would give up the Head of the Family and go back to her mother's people. It would kill the old woman surely if she were to do that.

"Too late, too late!" beat in her ears like the slow beat of the pendulum of a clock, as she went down the graveyard path and the mountain road, with Hugh Sinclair silent by her side.

CHAPTER XXVI

A FULL-DRESS REHEARSAL

"Your wedding-dress has come," Pen announced triumphantly, as Molly came in after changing her damp garments. "And the nuns have sent your lingerie; it is exquisite. Bless me, child, how well you look!"

Molly looked across the room and caught sight of herself in a tarnished mirror. The colour was bright in her cheeks and her eyes were shining.

"It is the wind and the rain," she answered. "There is nothing like the wind and the rain for the complexion, if only you would believe it, Aunt Pen, and you silly girls who sit moping by the fireside."

She was in inexplicably high spirits, and was giving them the rein.

"Your Aunt Thisbe is lying down," Pen went on. "We made her lie down; she looked so tired out. Come and see your wedding-gown! What a pity it is that you must not wear it before the twenty-fifth!"

"Why not, pray?" asked Molly, drinking her tepid tea and eating tea-cakes with a relish. "And how would it be supposing I could not get into it then? Would the marriage have to be postponed, or should I get married in an old frock?"

"There will be no misfits. The house is too good for that. As for why not, don't you know, Molly, that it is a most unlucky thing for a bride to put on her wedding-dress before the day itself?"

"I have heard as much," said Molly. "It means—what does it mean, Aunt Pen? What form does the ill-luck take?"

"There would be no wedding, after all," said Pen, with a lugubrious face.

"Oh, rubbish!" laughed Molly. "If the frock didn't fit, that would be tangible ill-luck. What else has come, Aunt Pen? The bridesmaids' frocks?"

"We waited for you to come in to examine the things," said Oonagh. "Margaret Heffernan has unpacked them by now. We left her amid the boxes in your room. Let us go and look at them; she will have done by this time."

Molly looked curiously at her sisters. Each had the same delicate air of languor. Each bowed her golden head like a daffodil on its slender stalk. In each the ethereal air but added to the beauty by which

more robust charms were apt to feel themselves overblown.

"I ran counter to superstition once," she said, "when I would have you in green and white for my marriage. Isn't the green the unluckiest colour in the world? Yet the bridesmaids will outshine the bride at the wedding. Come, you ungrateful, indifferent girls, come and feast your eyes on the most becoming garments you are ever likely to wear."

Her sisters smiled seriously as they got up without haste and went with her.

In Molly's room, the room which had been her mother's, with the three windows looking to the mountains and the Lough, the air was golden with the sunset still. The Lough danced in gold, and the gossamers on the bushes outside were sewn with drops of light.

Margaret Heffernan, a brown-faced, brown-eyed woman, with the dexterity and taste of a Frenchwoman, who had been lady's-maid to Lord Creggs's mother, and had travelled, stood by the great mahogany four-poster bed, smiling and showing all her even teeth.

"It will fit like a glove, Miss Molly," she said, looking down at the sweeping folds of the wedding-dress. "I will answer for it; or at least there is nothing that I could not set straight in a few minutes. It is beautiful."

"I want to see myself in it," Molly answered, touching the filmy lace that scarcely veiled the thick creamy-white silk.

"There will not be long to wait," the maid smiled.

"I am going to put it on now, this minute. I can't wait. Come, twist up my hair on the top. I want the veil and all, and the diamonds. This is going to a full-dress rehearsal."

Margaret Heffernan protested laughingly that it

was a most unlucky thing to do; but she was too much of a cosmopolitan to have retained any of her island superstitions, and even while she protested she was helping her young lady off with her simple dinner-dress, preparatory to making a swift toilet.

"We must see the effect," she said, "while the light is in the room."

The two sisters and Pen grouped themselves in one of the embrasures of the windows, to be out of the way of the rehearsal, and watched the maid's brown fingers roll up Molly's hair in magnificent coils on the top of her small head. Then the wedding-dress was put on, and the long train spread out nearly to the door. The veil was fastened with diamond pins. The golden light seemed to concentrate itself on the bride's figure, striking out radiance from the warm white of the gown, sparkling in the diamonds, broken into many reflections in the deep eyes which, as they looked away, were for a moment sombre.

"You are like your mother, Molly," said Pen—"like your dear mother; but not as she looked when she was a bride."

Pen had it in her mind that Molly was like the late Lady Creggs, after she had so marvellously assimilated the ways of those about her—not as she had looked, a simple girl, and too much overwhelmed with the honour done to her when she stood up to be made Lady Creggs. Pen was ever something of a blunderer, but she did not explain herself further on this occasion.

She took the real woman's delight in Molly, in her beautiful wedding-gown. Even the quiet sisters warmed into something like enthusiasm. Now that Molly had really defied the ill-luck, there was no use in having any more scruples about it; so Pen enjoyed the sight to the utmost, making Molly walk from one side of the big golden room to the other, while the maid, following,

arranged the beautiful train so that none of its glories should be lost.

"Now, enough of peacockery," said Molly, after awhile. "You can take off the gown, Margaret, and I shall help to dress the bridesmaids."

"Do let Thisbe see you," Pen put in eagerly. "She said she was not going to sleep, but only resting. I should think she is well rested by now. She will be delighted with the way they have draped that lace. It was our dear mother's, and we would never part with it even when——"

Pen was about to commit an indiscretion which would grieve her afterwards, and Molly hastily interposed.

"I will run and show myself to Aunt This," she said. "And do you help to dress the bridesmaids, Aunt Pen. I will tell Aunt This that there is something far prettier coming."

She picked up her train and, despite a little cry of dismay from Margaret, placed it carelessly over her arm and left the room.

She hoped she would not meet any of the servants in the corridor. She did not want the smiles and the admiration. Already her high spirits were going flat, and she was repenting a little of her impulse to dress up in her wedding-garments.

Outside the door of her room in the corridor it was dark—darker by reason of the change from the radiant atmosphere within. For a moment she could see nothing for the light in her eyes, and went along almost blindly. But by the time she reached her aunt's door she could see plainly enough.

She knocked lightly and went in without waiting for permission. The room seemed to her almost quite dark, for the blinds had been pulled down, and on this eastern side of the house the night had already begun to spread its wing.

She said nothing; perhaps her aunt was asleep, and if so she would not wake her. At the bedside she stood and looked down. She could see the little yellow face like old ivory against the whiteness of the pillow. Her aunt's eyes were wide open, staring up at her.

"So it is you again, Molly," she said in a muffled voice, like that of one still but partially awake. "It was you I heard crying last night, not the banshee. You would have more right even than she to cry, for you loved Nora like your own child. For it is for Nora you come: it must be for Nora, and it means, I suppose, that Carbery is drowned and the child will never be happy. I did my best for the children, Molly; your own child is safe. If she were married and I could see Nora and Oonagh happy, I would not care how soon the Lord would take me."

Her eyes closed and her speech resolved itself into inarticulate mutterings.

Molly turned away quickly. The vision of her seen between sleep and waking had evidently caused Thisbe to confuse her with her dead mother. She would go and put off this bridal finery and send Margaret for some tea for her aunt. Thisbe had probably slept during the tea-hour. What was it about Nora and Carbery? Dreams too?

She was closing the door softly when the monotonous voice began again.

"I did my best for your child, Molly," it said, "as I did my best for you, although at first you were wayward and would not believe it. But Creggs was enough to make any woman happy. Wasn't he enough for you? And isn't his successor enough for your child? Why are you in white like a bride? Is it the robe you wear in heaven?"

Molly closed the door behind her and returned to the others, vaguely chilled and troubled.

"I believe," she said to herself, "that it is Aunt Thisbe who is the banshee. Poor dear old soul, she is nothing but a little white mass of cares and anxieties over her children."

She looked absent-mindedly at her two beautiful sisters in their gowns of pale green *mouseline de soie* with fichus of white chiffon. "You will have all the eyes," she said. "But now, please, Margaret, help me off with this. Aunt Thisbe said nothing, Aunt Pen, about my looks. She was not awake, but she was just going to wake, I think. I shall ring for some tea for her by the time she wakes up."

She stood impatiently while the maid took off her gown with careful deliberation. By the time she was once again in ordinary garb the tea had come. She took the little tray from Margaret and herself carried it to her aunt's room, where she set it on a table by the bedside while she drew up the blinds and let the grey light into the room.

When she came back from the windows her aunt was awake.

"I have brought you some tea, Aunt This," she said. "You have had quite a long sleep. Let me help you up."

She put her arm around the small figure, and helped it to a sitting position, arranging the pillows tenderly to give support.

"I have been dreaming of your mother, Molly," the old lady said, as she sipped her tea. "I saw her as plainly as I see you, and she was all in white like a bride."

"You saw me, Aunt This," Molly said. "You were but half awake, and I came and stood by you. I had my wedding-gown on; it came this afternoon, and it fits perfectly."

"You should not have put it on," said Thisbe, fretfully. "Why did that woman, Pen, let you? Didn't she know

it was unlucky? I want to be able to tell your mother when I meet her—to tell her and Simon—our meeting cannot be far off—that you are happy. Supposing she had cried for you, Molly?"

"She cries for no one, Aunt This. She is at peace in heaven. Her tears were all wept on earth."

"She would not be happy with what should have made any woman happy. Perhaps I was wrong, Molly. I never acknowledged as much before. I should have let her go and come to her own people. Why, she even prayed in her own way by stealth. Simon would not have had it so, if he had known. I thought then of nothing but the pride of the family. Now that I am near the other world myself, I begin to see that there may have been another side to the question. It might have been better to have been like Simon, who was the proudest man I ever knew, and yet looked down on no one so long as they were honest and true. I have known him to shake hands with a peasant who had done him a service."

Molly smiled, half humorously, half proudly.

"Papa was a very fine gentleman," she said. "The very finest of fine gentlemen. But be sure mamma rests in peace. Do not grieve about her, Aunt This. She knows you loved her and meant nothing but what was good. Tell me now, what is it about Nora and Carbery and the yacht?"

"Ah, your mother had put it out of my head. My memory is slipping from me, Molly. I thought she might have been crying for Nora. She was fond of them. Never was such a step-mother. Their own poor mother hadn't the same love to give them. I am afraid Carbery is drowned, Molly. He was coming back to Nora. He and Edith and Jarvis Anson were all on the yacht. They left Youghal last Friday. There is no word of them."

Molly's heart sank, but she tried to wear a brave face.

"They need not be drowned," she said. "They are more likely to have run out to sea to avoid the cliffs. Who knows? They may have been picked up by an ocean-going vessel. There are a thousand things might have happened."

"Presently it will be in the newspapers, and Nora will hear," Thisbe said, disregarding the comfort.

"We must tell her before that comes," said Molly.

"I wish Creggs were here!" cried Thisbe, for the thousandth time. "Everything has gone wrong since he left us. That man of his must have a capacity for holding shot such as I have never heard of. Ridiculous that Creggs must stay to see the last one extracted!"

"Creggs will be here in a few days," said Molly, comfortingly. "When did you hear about the yacht?"

"Mrs. Lambert was here to-day, after you had gone out."

"Poor soul," said Molly. "And her Jarvis on board! She would be distracted. To-morrow morning I shall go to her. There may be good news. No, no; we will not anticipate a world without Carbery and Edith Aubrey and Jarvis Anson. It would be too cruel to lose them all."

"Too cruel things happen in this world," said Thisbe dejectedly.

The ill-luck of Molly's rehearsal seemed to be already arriving.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RETURN

Four or five days passed without news, without anything happening, except Lord Creggs promising his return in a day or two.

The storm had died down and there was quiet grey weather, full of the sadness of autumn. Every day Molly went to Castle Lambert for news. Every day she came back empty-handed, and would not carry the tale to Thisbe under Nora's eyes, but waited for her in the corridor, if indeed she did not find the old lady waiting for her, as was oftener the case.

Mrs. Lambert was ill from suspense and could not come. There was as much trouble under her roof as under the roof of Creggs Castle. And now the people about had heard that the yacht was missing; and, despite prohibitions to servants and the few visitors, Nora might hear the story at any time. It was time to tell her, Molly and Thisbe agreed one afternoon when Molly had come in tired and heavy-hearted from Castle Lambert.

"I shall do it," said Thisbe, trembling. "She is there alone. I packed Pen and Oonagh off for a drive. Oonagh is looking as washed-out as her sister. She is in there quite by herself."

She pointed a shaking forefinger at the double doors of the drawing-room, and made a step or two in their direction, stumbling like a blind person.

Molly put an arm about her.

"Go to the library," she said, "I will tell her. I will then come and tell you how she bore it. Why, the sight of your face would shock her more than she could bear."

She led the trembling, shaking old woman to the library, put her in the most comfortable of armchairs, set a footstool for her feet, and then prepared to leave her, with an appearance of courage she was far from feeling.

"Be brave," she said; "the De La Poer spirit will come to her help."

"I had to hear just such a story once," answered Thisbe, with her hand to her heart. "I heard it and I lived through it. I was seventy-five six weeks ago. I thought I should have died then, but I have lived for fifty-five years with the wound of it in my heart."

"Here are your drops," said Molly. "You had better take them. I will be back soon."

She went with her heart so heavy that it seemed to hang in her body like a stone, and draw her down with it, and she went quickly lest perhaps she should break down before her task was done. It did not bear thinking about.

The lamps had not yet been lit, and the long double drawing-room was full of dusk. By the light of the fire she saw her sister's figure in its gleaming white dress sitting in the usual place.

But what had come to Nora? This was no longer the drooping girl who had seemed bowed down by her weight of trouble. She was sitting upright with her small head held high. A sudden shower of sparks from the peat revealed her face, and it was full of uplifting. There were tears in her eyes, but it was plain that they were tears of joy. In her hand fluttered an open letter. A thought came to Molly's mind of the dove sent out of the ark, returning with the olive branch in its beak.

"You have had good news," she cried impetuously.

Nora turned and smiled on her.

"I have had good news," she said. "Patrick

Whelan called at the post-office in Ballinamona and found this. One of the maids brought it to me a long time ago. I can hardly realise it yet."

"Then they are safe?"

"Who are safe? The letter is from Lord Carbery. It was written in Youghal a fortnight ago, to say that he loved me. He loved me, do you hear, Molly? He loved me, after all. Some one must have forgotten to post the letter all those days, little knowing the difference it would make to me. He was coming back to claim me. Oh yes, and Mr. Anson is to marry Edith Aubrey. He, Valentine, says that he only went away with his sister because he feared she would be so unhappy about our marriage. He has always been first with her; and it had been the plan of all their lives that they should live together and be everything to each other. But he has been miserable being away from me, and having gone in silence."

In despair Molly knelt down by her sister, and put her warm young arms around the slender figure.

"I am so glad, darling, so glad," she said brokenly. "After all, the greatest happiness is to know that one has been loved. But, Nora, have you forgotten that . . . the yacht . . . left Youghal a fortnight ago? There is no news of her."

When she had said it she hid her own face, shuddering, listening for the heartbroken cry she felt must follow.

But there was no cry. Instead came Nora's voice speaking with soft steadiness.

"Perhaps he will never come back to me, after all," she said. "And poor Edith and poor Jarvis Anson! But you see, Molly, I might never have been strong enough to marry him. And though I feel a different girl since I had his letter, I might perhaps . . . never grow strong. It would be very sad if he had

had to lose me, after all. Better by far that I should lose him, since . . . perhaps, I shall not be long in following him."

Molly lifted her head and stared.

"You look quite happy, Noreen," she said. "Quite, quite happy."

"I am happier than I ever thought to be again," Nora said, looking at her letter with shining eyes.

Molly left her there in the twilight, and went to tell Thisbe how strangely Nora was taking the news.

"The trouble will come afterwards," she said to herself, "but at least it will come gradually. Oh, if Carbery could but come back, I believe Nora would be a strong woman, after all! How amazingly she seemed to have recovered herself! And so the banshee was for poor Carbery, after all!"

As she said it she heard, passing an open window, the thud of a horse's feet in the distance, coming like the Wild Huntsman, and for a second her heart leaped up, then fell again as she passed on to the library and the sick old woman waiting there. When the wind served, they could hear plainly horses and carriages on the distant road. Already, while she listened, the sound had died away.

The footman coming in to light the lamps disturbed Nora in her reverie. So sweet was her dream of the moment that she could not bear to have it broken. As the man moved about noiselessly, she got up and left the room.

There was not a sound in the house. She stood for an instant peering over the staircase-rails down to the hall below. No one came or went. It was the tea-hour in the servants' quarters.

The wind got up with a little cry and clashed the boughs of the trees about the house together. Nora had a sudden longing for the quiet evening sky and the

stars. The restlessness of sickness or of joy was upon her. The house stifled her. She must get out where no one would disturb her in her thoughts.

With a methodical carefulness she wrapped herself up in the little closet off the hall where the family left its wraps and umbrellas and all its outdoor impedimenta. She had a thought, as she wrapped a soft fleecy shawl about her head and throat, that for herself it did not greatly matter whether she were to take cold or not; but others would be troubled, and Nora's gracious consideration for others forbade any carelessness.

As she went out quietly, a dog, who had followed all her movements anxiously, went with her. He had been a gift from Lord Carbery, who possessed the finest Irish terrier stock in the county, and Boxer did no discredit to his pedigree.

The last pale gleam of dying day was over the distant Atlantic. The air was delicious, soft as a child's lips, tender as a caress. The trees were beginning to clash together as though another storm were coming. The lights of the house made the obscurity of the dim avenue of trees beyond darker by contrast.

Holding her letter to her by her folded arms as though she carried a beloved child, Nora plunged into the obscurity of the avenue of beeches. Between them the carriage road ran; but either side were widths of velvet sward alive with rabbits in the daytime, where the dog nosed about silently. As she went she saw the tall shape of a deer between the division of the trees. The blackbird was singing a sad autumnal song, sweet, but unlike the jocund note of the Spring. The trees met overhead, and made the growing darkness of the evening greater. Nora was not afraid. She could see now in the distance the

glow of a lamp in the lodge-keeper's window. She would go so far and turn back again.

As she went, in her quiet ecstasy she had been partly conscious of the sound of a horse's feet somewhere on the road. Suddenly she stopped and listened to them. How fast the rider came! Supposing he came to her with some strange, wonderful news! It is the feeling we have all had, hearing wheels or hoof-beats or a footstep some time or other. Even if we expect nothing, there are always the wonderful chances.

She lost the hoof-beats for an instant and realized it with a pang of disappointment. Perhaps she was beginning to come out of her first unreasonable joy, was beginning to feel her immeasurable pain.

Something crossed the distant light in the lodge-keeper's window. Then she heard the hoof-beats again, and stood still to listen. They were nearer now. Why, they were in the avenue of beeches; soon they would reach, pass her, where she stood aside on the grass with her head bent.

Suddenly the moon rolled out from behind a cloud and fell on her uplifted face through a break in the boughs. Every nerve in her body listened as she waited. The message must be for her. If it were not, she would die of the disappointment.

The horse was pulled up sharply by her side, and the rider flung himself off and came up to her. From under his hat he peered into her face, half-frightened.

"Is it you, Nora, or your ghost?" he asked, and the voice was Lord Carbery's voice. "And how did you know, asthoreen, that I was coming? Why are you out like this? You came to meet me—surely you came to meet me!"

He slipped an arm about her, and she leant upon it heavily.

"You are dead, are you not?" she asked, and her eyes were closed. "Dead and drowned. I did not mind so much when they told me, since I knew that I would soon come to you."

"And all the time I was coming to you, as fast as an Atlantic liner would carry me," he said with tender compassion, clasping her head close to him. "Feel that for the kiss of a dead man! No, darling, I am as much alive as any man, and more eager for my bride than any other man within the four seas of Ireland. Why, how pale you are, Nora asthore! Have you only white roses for me?"

And so that evening some of the old happiness came back to Creggs Castle. There was not much of asking for the bride on Lord Carbery's part. He seemed to take it for granted, as though the thing had been arranged long before.

"We shall be married the same day as Edie and Anson," he said. "They have settled the 14th of October. Edie would have all that time to get her wedding-clothes. You can be ready then? Oh yes, I'm sure you can. I will take her to Algiers, and bring her back like a milkmaid next June." This to Thisbe, who sat with a Nunc Dimittis expression upon her face. "Not in the yacht though. The poor *Seamew!* I expect she is banging herself to pieces, what is left of her, somewhere about the coast of Newfoundland now. She was breaking up when we struck the *Huron*. How lucky it was a mail-steamer, and made such a fast run home! I can tell you I thought she crawled like a tortoise. I fumed and fretted all the time, while Edie and Anson kept telling me how glad I ought to be of our escape. I couldn't be glad thinking of this child. And so she didn't actually know till I was on my way to her? That rascal, Corney Daly, whom I paid off at Youghal, who undertook to post our letters,

ought to get a rope's end; but if I ever come across him, I shall present him with a sovereign instead."

"How pleased Creggs will be!" said Thisbe.

"Oh, Creggs," said Lord Carbery, not looking away from Nora's face, which he stared at in the most unashamed absorption, "Creggs knew all the time that I was bound to be his brother-in-law."

"Indeed," said Thisbe, "we had never gone so far astray at all, at all, if only Creggs had been here."

CHAPTER XXVIII

FLIGHT

"So that is the end of the banshee, I expect," said Molly to herself, taking down her black hair before the glass, "and the luck has come back, to Creggs, despite my dressing-up as a bride before the occasion warranted."

She caught sight of Boxer lying in a wicker chair by her bedside, turning a bright appealing eye upon her from the coil into which he had curled himself.

"So you have deserted your mistress for to-night?" she said. "She has no need of you. Perhaps she has forgotten you, and shut you out. Love is selfish, you know, Boxer. Never mind; you shall keep me company to-night."

The dog thumped his tail in the chair for acknowledgment. When the lights were out, the room was pitchy black. The young moon had sunk below the horizon long ago. For once Molly fell asleep quickly and slept soundly. She had a grateful heart, and was ever ready to take the good the day brought. Since poor Nora was happy, and the joy might even save her precious life, Molly would not look beyond to-day.

She awoke with a beating heart and a sense of nameless depression in the pitchy darkness. There was some sound in her ears. What was it? A cry that rose and fell, was silent only to begin again, went on with a horrible monotony of suffering.

Her fear was outstripped by the feeling that first of all she must stop that terrible lamenting. It was intolerable to listen to it.

She sprang out of bed and thrust her feet into her slippers. As she did so she looked half-unconsciously towards the lighter oblong of blackness which the window-frame enclosed. She would hardly have been surprised if she had seen a dark shape there, wringing its hands and hiding its face in heavy hair as it wept.

But the sound was within the house, not without. It was quite close at hand, and broken by rapid speech, only to begin again. There was no clamour about it, but quiet despair—the low crying of a child left alone in the darkness with no one to comfort its fears.

A rough little tongue against her bare foot comforted her.

"Good Boxer!" she said. "Dear Boxer! We shall see what it is, shan't we? Why, I believe your hair is on end, though it is so rough, one cannot be sure. Stay—where is that candle?"

The candle could not be found, however she groped: but she soon gave up the search.

"We must put a stop to that crying, Boxer," she said. "I'm not surprised it terrified the aunts. It is an uncanny, horrible kind of sound. Now we are ready. Not a sound for your life, old fellow! We don't want to waken the house."

The sound led her to Oonagh's door

"Ah," she said, with a catch of her breath, "it is no banshee, after all. Oonagh has been feeling the

trouble about Nora, and her dreams have been terrible. She has not yet realized in sleep that all that is happily over."

She was in Oonagh's room now, the dog rubbing himself by her as though for reassurance. She made her way to the bedside, outstretching her arms in the darkness lest she should collide with any article of furniture. The crying had ceased now, and had given place to a quiet low moaning which suggested patience and restraint. Molly was not sure that the crying had not been less mournful to listen to.

She knelt down by her sister's bed, so that, if the sleeper wakened, she would have no sudden shock of discovery. She laid her face upon her arms, wondering what she was to do to console the suffering soul imprisoned in sleep, or whether it would not be better to wake her gently. But before she could make up her mind the low, rapid talking began again.

Molly listened at first without comprehension. Then by slow degrees the secret Oonagh was revealing broke upon her understanding. She trembled as she listened. So it was for her own grief, not for Nora's, that Oonagh was playing the banshee at night. And she, Molly, who at any time would have died for either of her sisters, was the cause of all the trouble.

Kneeling there, scarcely daring to breathe, she recalled many things belonging to the time when she had discouraged Lord Creggs and he had found comfort with Oonagh. Why, he would have gone on finding comfort for ever, for who could resist Oonagh's sweetness for long? Not certainly one so sweet-natured as Lord Creggs. But then she, Molly, had come in, and, not caring for him herself, had robbed her sister of her lover. Oh, it would have been intolerable enough if she had cared for Creggs! But to have done it not caring for him, caring a thousand times more for the

cousin who was her natural affinity—that was too great a wrong.

Tears rushed into her eyes—tears of pity for Oonagh; of sheer bitterness against herself. She did not know what she was going to do. Her thoughts would not come out of their turmoil. But the impulse to comfort her sister was so great that she risked waking her.

"There is nothing to be ashamed of," she said softly. "He would be heartbroken if he knew you were ashamed."

The sleeper moved in her sleep and seemed to listen.

"He would have loved you if Molly had not come between. She would not have done it for worlds if she had known. Poor Molly! it would break her heart to make you suffer."

"Molly loves him," said Oonagh, in a muffled voice.

"Molly does not love him. She will give him up. Her heart is not in the marriage. He will turn to you for comfort again, as he did before. He will love you in time. Forgive poor Molly."

Oonagh breathed the softest, deepest sigh, such a sigh as Molly knew betokened a world's weight of trouble cleared away, leaving power to breathe, to expand, to live again.

A little longer Molly knelt by the bedside. There was no renewal of the crying or the speech. She had found the way to comfort Oonagh. There was not a sound in the room but the regular breathing of the sleeping girl when Molly left it, and, feeling chilled and miserable, crept back into her own bed.

She lay awake, her wide-open eyes on the ceiling above her till the grey dawn was in the room. Then at last she slept, worn out. But in the long hours of tense thinking some kind of a solution had come to her.

Oonagh and she met at the breakfast-table. There was no one else down. Molly's eyes ached, and her

limbs seemed full of an intolerable weariness. There was a letter from Lord Creggs on her plate. She took it away to the window, and read it while Oonagh made the tea.

"I hope the letter contained pleasant news," said Oonagh gently, as Molly returned to her place.

"Creggs comes back on Tuesday," said Molly, laconically. She was watching her sister's face, which was in the light while her own was in the shadow. She saw the faintest, most delicate colour flicker in her sister's cheek; then die out as though extinguished by the will which showed itself in the pale repression of the soft mouth.

"And that is pleasant, surely," said Oonagh, "we have all missed him. And his man—how is he?"

"The last of the shots has been extracted, and the lung is healing. He will be as sound as ever in a few weeks' time. You look this morning, Oonagh, as though you had slept well. The excitement about Nora did not keep you awake."

"I slept very soundly. I remember nothing at all of the night, though I think my dreams were comfortable."

"You have been looking of late as though you had not slept well."

"I was anxious, as we all were," Oonagh said simply. "Perhaps I did not sleep very well."

Nora came in with a light step—very different from the invalid's lagging step of yesterday. She came round and kissed each of her sisters. As she stood by Molly, she touched her cheek reproachfully.

"We have changed places," she said. "To-day you look like the mourning bride."

"I had troubled dreams."

"Ah, I expect that rascal, Boxer, lay upon your feet. He was in your room, was he not? I believe he has often given me nightmares."

"He is the best of good comrades," said Molly, stooping to touch the little hard head beside her.

"He was so rejoiced to see . . . Valentine last night. I think I hardly believed he was really alive and safe from the sea till I heard Boxer's extravagant welcome. But . . . I am forgetting; Aunt Thisbe asks to be excused. If you will kindly send up her breakfast, Oonagh. She is a little tired this morning."

"If you will go springing these sensations on us," said Molly, with a pretence at gaiety.

Pen was the next arrival. She had been with her sister after Nora had left her, and reported that Thisbe was rather worn-out with the excitement of yesterday. She was going to rest in bed during the morning hours, so as to be fresh for the evening when Lord Carbery was to dine with them. She asked not to be disturbed.

Molly spent a very busy morning in her own room. First she wrote a letter which she addressed to Lord Creggs. Afterwards she turned out her wardrobe, and selected from it the plainest dresses and garments she possessed, rejecting the finer things which had come to her of late months, and all the dainty, delicate things of her trousseau. She got out a trunk then and packed it, labelling it with the name of a Dublin hotel. By lunch-time she had all arrangements made as though for a sudden journey. She had made up her mind to tell her Aunt Thisbe at the first possible moment that she had broken off her marriage. Then she would leave the house so as not to be a blot on the rejoicing about Nora. Her aunt would be bitterly angry with her, incredulous about the slight to the Head of the Family. What matter? She must bear that for the present. The future she believed would justify her. Perhaps Aunt Thisbe would forgive her presently, for Oonagh's sake.

After lunch she went in search of Eily Laffan. She had had thoughts of asking the girl to accompany her, in some capacity, when she left Ireland as Lady Creggs. Eily was attached to her, and had worn as disconsolate an air as a neglected dog since she had been handed over to Oonagh. Now, at least, Eily was going to be made happy.

On her way out she slipped her letter to Lord Creggs into the box in the hall which stood ready for the post-boy. She was wearing her riding-habit, having it in her mind to take Fatima out for the last time, for she could not bear the house with nothing to do while she waited for that interview with her aunt. Perhaps it would not be so hard, after all. Had not Aunt Thisbe said that she began to see things differently?

She found Eily alone in the potting-shed, where she was transferring a number of bulbs from the clay to the shelves for the winter.

"Well, Eily?" she asked, "how are you getting on?"

The girl's melancholy face brightened at the sound of her voice.

"'Tisn't like when you were in it, Miss Molly," she said. "I do often be wishing we had you back."

"My sister is not the same?"

"Miss Oonagh's heart isn't in it. I think she'll be giving it up soon. Myself I don't care how soon."

"Supposing, Eily, supposing that I was not going to marry Lord Creggs, but was going away where I should learn more about this business, and afterwards set up in Scilly as a flower-grower. Supposing that were so, and I asked you to come with me, would you come?"

Eily Laffan lifted the heavy lids of her eyes.

"Is it true, Miss Molly?" she asked.

"It is true, Eily. No one knows but yourself. I

feel that I can trust you. I have not even told my aunts yet. Will you come?"

"I will travel the world with you, Miss Molly."

"We shall be very poor, Eily. I have very little money. Enough to pay our premiums, and afterwards perhaps buy a plot."

"Sure we'll make money. You're born to it, Miss Molly. 'Tis the same with Mr. Hugh Sinclair above in the Glen. He's after making—I don't know how much out of his cucumbers. He's built houses, you know. And the honey! Forty pounds they say he has made this season. 'Tis bad news about him, Miss Molly."

"What news? I have heard none."

"I saw you once with him in the Glen. I thought ye were friends. They say that big dog of his has gone mad and bitten him. Herself will go crazy about it. She's terrible fond of him, and no wonder. Himself was the good son. God preserve him from madness!"

Molly stared at her, her blue eyes dark in her white face. Then, without a word, she turned and left her.

CHAPTER XXIX

MOLLY GOES HOME

Hugh Sinclair was covering in a grave, a great grave, big enough for a child's. His face was drawn and stern, and his lips compressed. His mother had just left him, weeping, and gone indoors. He was paying the last rites to a good friend alone.

The grave was in a little sunny field below the house, where heather was allowed to grow for the sake of the bees. It was the 22nd of September, but chill

October was already in the air. Yet there were drops of sweat on the brow, his sweat of suffering rather than of exertion.

There was cold pale sunshine; and the shadow of a tree, the leaves of which were already sparse, danced upon the grave. A robin singing in the tree rocked to and fro in the shadow. A last few spadefuls of earth, and he smoothed over the grave he had made. Then leant of the spade with a face of desolation.

Another shadow crossed the tree-shadow. He looked up and saw Molly. Her hands were stretched to him in entreaty. A light broke across his face that would have told any one his love.

"You!" he said, half incredulously.

"I!" she answered. "I have come back to my mother's people. They are my real people, after all. You need not say No to me. If you and your mother will have me."

She was going red and white as she spoke, and her voice was fainting and trembling.

"Say No to you!" he repeated, with a glad quickness, like the note of a blackbird in his voice—"when you have stooped to me, my queen, my star!"

He stepped across the little mound of earth and put his arms about her, one hand under her chin to lift her face so that he might look in her eyes.

"And Lord Creggs?" he asked.

"I have written to Lord Creggs. The letter is on its way now. He will forgive me, and will be happier without me. I should never have accepted him. My heart was with my mother's people, with my own people. You will not reject me?"

"Reject you, beloved! To think of your breaking all those barriers for me! How brave you are!"

"Will you keep me now? I have come to you empty-handed, not even a second frock. I have left

Fatima at the gate. She is to go back. She is Lord Creggs's gift. I thought, if you kept me, you would send her back."

"Let her rest for to-night. To-morrow I will send her back. We shall be married as soon as the law permits. To think you should have come to me at such a moment! I was thinking it was the heaviest of my life."

"Ah, the danger! I had forgotten that. How could I have forgotten it? I could never have come to you like this only for it. All the way I have been afraid that you would set your stern brows against me, and refuse."

"Why should I do that?"

"You might be quixotic enough. Now, I do not see your wounds; but everything must be done to ward off worse things. Even our marriage must not delay you. You must go to Paris, to Pasteur. I shall stay with your mother till you return."

He looked at her in wonder.

"What garbled tale have you been hearing? I have not been bitten."

"You have not been bitten! Oh, thank God! I heard that Bruce had gone mad and bitten you. That was why I came to you."

"So that was why you came to me? No wonder you thought I would reject you, you brave child."

He looked down at the grave with a brooding tenderness in his gaze.

"Bruce would never have bitten me," he said. "And his death has given you to me. He died like a hero."

"I am not ashamed of having come to you," she said, lifting her eyes to his. "What does it matter, when we love each other? Still, if the story had not reached me, I would have waited for you to come to

me. I was making arrangements to go to England with Eily Laffan; we thought of growing flowers in the Scilly Islands."

"You shall grow them in the Glen instead," he said. "I am taking over Alison Graham's farm. There will be plenty of work for you and for Eily there. Now, tell me, how did you break away? Did any one know you were coming?"

"I left a note for Aunt Thisbe. I went into her room. She was asleep. I confess I was glad not to have to tell her. I left the note where she would see it when she awoke. I hope it will not be too great a shock for her poor heart. Yet she has great spirit. She will perhaps forgive me, some day. It was necessary to grieve her. I wish she had not been so obstinate."

A shadow fell across the joy of Molly's face.

"I wish it had not been needful too," her lover said gently. "But we cannot help disappointing her. Come, dear, sit down with me on the seat under the thorn-tree, and I will tell you about Bruce."

They sat down under the tree covered with yellow leaves, and haws already taking a deeper colour.

"If the Victoria Cross were given to dogs," he said, "or any such decoration, Bruce should wear it. Yesterday he and I were in Ardnaree. The children were playing before the cottage doors as we went down the street. One little golden-haired child—Sally Kavanagh's only child—her husband's boat went down in the storms last winter—toddled to meet Bruce. The children all knew him, and knew they could take any amount of liberties with his good nature. I turned aside to speak to the mother. Suddenly I saw her face change, become petrified. I looked, and there was a great dog, half collie, half mastiff, coming at a shambling trot down the street. The slaver was running from his mouth and his coat was staring. The child was right in his

track. He was snapping and biting as he came. Before we could do anything Bruce had closed with him. I rushed to the police barracks for a revolver. When I came back the street was clear; all the children within doors, and the doors shut. But the dogs were fast locked. I shot the mad dog behind the ear. There was enough of the virus of madness in him to infect half the countryside. Bruce was horribly bitten, one ear hanging off, a hole in his shoulder . . . " he stopped with a dry sob—" even if the dog had not been mad, it would have been hard to save him. The police wanted to make an end of him there and then, but I wouldn't have it. I got him into a cart and carried him home. Then I rode down to Ballinamona for enough chloroform to end him. He was lying in his house when I came back, almost dying, yet he wagged his tail when he heard my foot. I don't mind telling you, darling, that I stooped down and kissed him before I did it, and told him why I had to do it—why I couldn't even give him a chance for his life. I believe he understood. He tried to lick my hand as I put the towel over his face. . . . "

He stopped, choking, and looked away down the Glen to the blue autumnal distances. When he looked at Molly again, his eyes were bloodshot.

" They are making songs about him in the village," he said. " We don't love animals enough in this country . . . but he saved their children. Come now; it is time you saw my mother. She is grieved for the dog and for me. Let her know what great happiness has come to us."

They went in hand-in-hand, leaving the grave lying in the pale sunshine, and the shadow of the robin rocking at his song of thanksgiving outlined on his shadow-tree.

The little mother sat in the spotlessly clean room, knitting, as was her wont. The smell of the peat and the little country smell of dampness was crossed by the

sweetness of mignonette and heather. The eight-day clock ticked quietly. The house was already dark on this side of it, but the snowiness of the floor and the walls made a light of a kind, and the fire of wood and peat burned brightly.

Mrs. Sinclair, in her deep golden chair of twisted straw ropes, had her back to the door as they entered.

"My poor boy," she said gently, without turning round. "Is that over?"

"It is over," her son answered. "And I have brought you some one you will be glad to welcome."

Mrs. Sinclair looked round then, and with an exclamation stood up and took Molly into her arms.

"She has come to stay with us," her son said. "To be your daughter and my wife."

"And . . . and . . . ?"

Mrs. Sinclair looked doubtfully at her son.

"Her engagement is broken off," he said. "She felt she could not do without me."

He could not keep the ring of the lover's exultation out of his voice.

"I always wanted Molly for my daughter," the mother said. "Now I have the wish of my heart."

"I have no clothes, none at all," said Molly. "I came just as I stand up. What am I to do? They will send my things from Creggs presently, no doubt. But what am I to do till then?"

"I have a chest of things meant for Hugh's wife. I have always loved fine sewing. When I had enough of my own, I began making for her. How little I could have thought that it would be you! Why, I have a number of things, old and yellowed now, which I made for your mother. Lady Creggs did not need them, or I was too proud to offer them. The only time she came here afterwards, I showed them to her. She was holding

you by the hand. How little I could have thought that you would wear them! God is good."

"If I could only know now that they had all forgiven me at Creggs, I should be the happiest woman on earth," said Molly, a day later.

She had gone over the little spotless house with Mrs. Sinclair that morning, had inspected all the housekeeper's treasures of fine linen and old china and thin silver, and glass heavy as rock crystal. She had made the acquaintance of Maggie in the kitchen, who looked upon the house as quite as much hers as the Sinclairs'. She had seen that deep chest of exquisitely fine garments, as fine as those the nuns had made for Lady Creggs which were left without a regret in the old wardrobe in Molly's rooms at Creggs Castle. As she went deeper through its contents she came on other fine garments underneath, daintier than hers even, with finest tucking and little frills of lace.

"For Hugh's children," said the mother. "Many the happy hour I spent over those little things!"

The keys of the house were laid ungrudgingly in Molly's lap. The store-cupboard, the linen-closet, the china-closet—all were to be hers.

"I am glad to give them," said Mrs. Sinclair, eyeing them wistfully, however. "I have only held them till Hugh's wife should come."

"And if she had proved a slattern, or unworthy to be their custodian?" asked Molly.

"Hugh could never have chosen such a person," said Mrs. Sinclair, with a shocked expression.

"You shall teach me to be competent," said Molly, with generous arms about the mother's neck. "I accept your keys—only to return them. You and Maggie must manage all for me. And I shall sit at your feet and learn—in the intervals of my own work. Didn't you know I was going to farm-violets? Oh yes, I am.

Hugh and I are going to work together. Here are the keys."

Mrs. Sinclair took them with a little eagerness.

"If you really haven't time, my dear," she said, gloating over her recovered treasures, "I suppose I must take it off your hands. See how bright they are! Do you know I once knew a woman—she wasn't a Glenswoman, I am glad to say—whose keys were rusty!"

"You would know another if I took them," said Molly, "for I am out in all winds and weathers, and am often drenched with rain."

It was the evening of the second day that Molly made the speech—

"If I could only know that they had all forgiven me, I should be the happiest woman on earth."

"Will it be too hard?" asked Hugh Sinclair, who was kneeling on the rug before the fire, looking very much too massive for the position, toasting bread for the tea. The tea was always a meal of importance at the Glen Farm. He had taken the toasting-fork from Molly's hands and placed her in his mother's chair, the excellent owner of it being busy in the kitchen over dainties to go with the tea.

"I am only afraid of Aunt Thisbe," said Molly. "Perhaps Aunt Thisbe never will get over it. If I could only have saved her the pain!"

Yet, despite those misgivings, her days at the Glen Farm were days of exquisite happiness. Nearly all day she was abroad with her lover. They gave her no time to be sad. In the evenings, sitting by the fire between mother and son, she tasted almost full content—the content of the one who has come home.

For a day or two no one came from Creggs.

"They have left me to myself," said Molly, with a somewhat watery smile when the day that was to have been her wedding-day was nearly over.

Then, coming in at the tea-hour, she found Oonagh waiting for her, being entertained politely by Mrs. Sinclair, who, as soon as Molly had come in, went out and left them together.

"You might have trusted our love, Molly," said Oonagh, reproachfully.

Oonagh was pale, and looked as if she had wept a good deal during the last few days.

"I was so sorry to hurt any one," said Molly, hanging her head like a child. "But I never loved any one only my cousin. We are to be married in a fortnight. I could have trusted you, dear Oonagh, but it was Aunt Thisbe. Have I broken her heart?"

Oonagh came a little nearer and put both her hands on Molly's shoulders.

"Wouldn't it be better," she said, "that she shouldn't know—in this world at least?"

Something in her face told Molly the truth.

"She is dead?" she said with a little wail.

"She was dead, she must have been dead before you left the letter close to her hand. She died quietly in her sleep. She never had that letter. I opened it and read it: no one saw it but me. Oh, Molly! surely it is all for the best. Now will you come back and see her before—before—she goes? Creggs is with us. He has done everything, but he has gone over to Athclea till to-morrow so that you might come. No one has anything but love for you. Oh, and Creggs has sent you back Fatima. He prays you to keep her."

And so, after all, Molly revisited Creggs Castle, and left it again, with the kisses of her sisters and her Aunt Pen warm on her cheeks.

Aunt Pen has quite forgiven Molly her *mésalliance*, as perhaps her sister would never have done. After all, the Head of the Family remained in the family. He and Oonagh were married about a year after Nora had

become Lady Carbery, and Oonagh adorned the peerage much better than Molly would ever have done, and so Pen was fain to acknowledge.

"Molly was always wanting to do things," she said. "It was a most unfortunate tendency, and one my dear sister Thisbe always deplored. Whereas Oonagh would sit with her hands before her doing nothing but looking beautiful hour after hour. I really think that Molly chose the life that suited her best after all, though dear Thisbe would never have seen it in that light."

"And the Sinclairs are older in the country than we are," said Lady Carbery, to whom the remark was made. "It is such a good thing they have to do with the land. After all, we all go back to the land, as Creggs says. And Valentine has the highest opinion of Hugh Sinclair. And, of course, dear Creggs swears by him."

THE END

PRINTED BY WM. CLOWES AND SONS, LTD., LONDON AND BECCLES, ENGLAND

A SELECTION OF

MURRAY'S 2/- net Novels

SIR H. RIDER HAGGARD
Moon of Israel | Jess

S. BARING-GOULD
Court Royal | Mehalah

F. ANSTEY
A Fallen Idol | Vice Versa

STANLEY J. WEYMAN
The New Rector
Under the Red Robe
The Great House

BENNET COPPLESTONE
The Lost Naval Papers

MRS. H. DE LA PASTURE
Peter's Mother

A. E. W. MASON
The Broken Road
The Four Feathers

MAUD DIVER
Unconquered

G. F. BRADBY
Dick

E. W. HORNUNG
Fathers of Men

PHILLPOTTS, EDEN
Widecombe Fair
The Thief of Virtue

TYNAN, KATHARINE
The Honourable Molly

BIRMINGHAM, GEORGEA.
The Red Hand of Ulster

CHOLMONDELEY, MARY
Notwithstanding

GISSING, GEORGE
A Life's Morning

WREN, P. C.
The Wages of Virtue

FALKNER, J. MEADE
The Nebuly Coat

New Volumes in
MURRAY'S FICTION LIBRARY

HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER

'Linda Strong is clear eyed, self-reliant, a delightful specimen of modern girlhood. Her personality radiates vigour, and her heart is the home of truth. . . . The novel's clear outlook, frank charm, and spontaneous humour make one feel at peace with all men.'—*Yorkshire Post.*

THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Again is Sherlock Holmes triumphant! With his established methods ever newly applied, he solves his mysteries and brings enjoyment to readers.

STRANGE ROADS

'A really fine achievement. . . . A strong, distinguished piece of work that cannot fail to increase its author's reputation.'—*Book Post.*

THE STRONG HOURS

'A splendid piece of workmanship; a satisfying book in all respects.'—*Brooklyn Eagle.*

THE TREASURE OF GOLDEN CAP

'A first-rate story of the days when robbery and sea-trade went on side by side. . . . The book has humour and colour and gallantry, and as one reads one can hear the breaking surf and taste the salt wind blowing from the sea.'

Daily News.

THE BRIDGE ACROSS

'To find a portrayer of children more clever than Mrs. L. Allen Harker would be a difficult task. Her touch and sympathy were never more charmingly displayed than in "The Bridge Across."'—*Evening News.*

PERCH OF THE DEVIL

'Mrs. Atherton is in our judgment the ablest woman-writer of fiction now living.'

SIR ROBERTSON NICOLL in *British Weekly.*